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Representation and reinterpretation of the waste land myth in Anglo-American literature

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REPRESENTACIÓN Y REINTERPRETACIÓN DEL MITO DE LA TIERRA BALDÍA EN LA LITERATURA ANGLOAMERICANA

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PROGRAMA DE DOCTORADO EN ESTUDIOS LITERARIOS

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REPRESENTATION AND REINTERPRETATION OF THE WASTE LAND MYTH IN ANGLO-AMERICAN LITERATURE

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CONTENTS

…debía haber Dios, aunque fuera pequeñito, para que mandara rayos contra los hombres de simiente podrida que encharcan la alegría de los campos.

FEDERICO GARCÍA LORCA – *YERMA* (1934)

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this doctoral dissertation is to examine, through a myth-critical interpretation of the selected corpus, the process of representation and reinterpretation of the Arthurian myth of the Waste Land at different stages of the Anglo-American literary tradition,[1] so as to critically explore the ideological repercussions of mythical reinterpretation as a literary practice. For insofar as myths can be argued to articulate dominant power ideologies that are the alleged guarantors of social and political order, myth reinterpreted in literature can often be analyzed, as this study aims to demonstrate, as myth *subverted*, thus shaping in remade narratives counter-discourses that challenge and contest the dominant discourse of social order and political stability legitimized through mythology. Such process of ideological contestation through mythical representation and reinterpretation will be specifically examined through a myth-critical study of a selected corpus of influential works circumscribed to four different stages of the Anglo-American literary tradition, namely: early-modern English drama; the Romance Revival in British literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; American modernism; and American 'after-modernism' and postmodernism. These four stages of the literary tradition in English have been chosen due to the relevance and functionality of the 'mode' of romance in general and of the Waste Land myth in particular in the time periods and literary aesthetics selected, as it will be exposed throughout the chapters. Reasons of ideological coherence in terms of the specific and meaningful reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth as a myth of political domination and social degeneration have also been fundamental in the selection of works to be

[1] The use of the term 'Waste Land' myth rather 'Grail myth' or 'Fisher King myth' throughout this study is explained later in this introduction. In order to clarify the matter of capitalization however, it should be noted that the form 'Waste Land' will be capitalized when used to refer either to the myth itself, or to the constituent mytheme, as it will be also the case with other mythemes such as Grail, Knight, or even ocasionally Quest. The forms 'waste land' and 'wasteland' will be used indifferently to refer to literal wasted lands depicted in the texts examined along this study. Of course, no capitalization will be used when discussing specific representations of knights, grails or quests in the texts examined.

explored, since as mentioned, this study aims at disclosing the immanence of myth as a political weapon, so to speak, enforced by the ruling and dominant classes to perpetuate a set of power structures that are presented as preternaturally legitimized through mythology.

THE MYTH

For the purpose of the myth-critical analysis to be carried out through this study, the most relevant phenomenon in the process of representation and reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth in pre-modern texts is the pervasiveness of its core mythemes and ideological meaning along the centuries, namely: the Maimed King and his sexual impotence; the mystical connection between the King's emasculation and the blighted land that has either been plagued, cursed, or wrecked by war; the narrative pattern of the quest; the magical, restorative properties of the Grail; and finally the heroic task of a young knight, who takes up as his duty the trial of finding the Grail so as to heal the Maimed King and restore the Waste Land, physically and spiritually. However, from the perspective of this study, it is critical, too, to notice the successive reinterpretations of the myth that take place over the centuries, specifically the process of euhemerism described by Loomis at an early stage (24), and the subsequent Christianization of the tale throughout the Middle Ages. One can thus begin to realize how over the course of the centuries, the Waste Land myth articulated varied symbolic, historical, social and religious meanings, depending on the communitarian structures and dominant ideologies that shaped the different reinterpretations of the myth. The dialectics that arbitrate the continuous struggle between permanence and reinterpretation in the literary representation of the myth is the key to interpreting the ideological—and often subversive—functionality of pre-modern mythology in the Anglo-American literary tradition, at different stages of what will be further on distinguished as 'historical modernity' and 'cultural modernity'.[2] Therefore, it must always be taken into consideration that the Waste Land myth has traditionally operated as the symbolic correlative of a specific historical and socio-cultural context which has thus been reflected and symbolically represented in literature by means of a recurrent process of

[2] See p. 142

mythical representation and reinterpretation that will be analyzed in detail in the course of this study.

The earliest extant version of the Waste Land myth appears in Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval, the Story of the Grail* (ca. 1180) (Loomis 28). In this early French romance, the young knight Perceval arrives at the castle of Fisher King, who has been wounded between the thighs, and whose sexual impotence has been transferred to the land he is mystically bound to so that his kingdom has become a wasteland. As it can be easily observed, this mythic tale reproduces symbolically the ideological foundation of monarchy as a political institution, as it will be sufficiently explored in the first part of this study; indeed, the story of Perceval proposes for a mystical, sympathetic connection between the king and his kingdom and thus characterizes the mysticism of kingship as inherently and preternaturally divine. From a critical standpoint however, and as it will be detailed, it must be taken into consideration that, according to the critical tradition that has explored the myth of the Waste Land along the twentieth century, the French romance *Perceval* is only one of the earliest reinterpreted forms of a more ancient mythical tale, the origin of which can be found in Celtic mythology. From this critical perspective, argued most famously by Arthurian expert Roger Sherman Loomis, ancient Irish myths are believed to have shaped and influenced Welsh and Breton legends in which one may trace the prototypes of each of the mythemes that compose the tale, insofar as, Loomis claims, "just as the Breton tales drew largely on Welsh tradition, so the Welsh tales in turn drew largely on material preserved to us in the Irish sagas" (18).

The examination of the Breton tales mentioned by Loomis demonstrates that, in fact, there are obvious similarities between the Breton legends and Arthurian romance. And yet, in order to validate Loomis's claim, it is necessary to account for the relationship that connects the medieval Breton tales and the knightly romances composed in France in the twelfth century. Loomis explains:

> Evidence, both external and internal, combines to show that the *conteurs* of the twelfth and early thirteenth century were in the main Bretons, descendants of those Britons who in the fifth and sixth century, as a result of the Anglo-Saxon invasion, had emigrated to Armorica, which we now know as Brittany. Through intercourse with their continental neighbours they had become largely bilingual, and had added French to their native speech which was akin to Welsh; today their descendants in western Brittany remain largely bilingual. (13-4)

A relationship of continuity can thus be established between ancient Celtic mythology, Welsh myths, Breton mythic narratives, and, lastly, the medieval French romances composed by the *conteurs*. The earliest link of this chain—that is, the Celtic mythology that Loomis considers to be the origin of Arthurian romance—is to be found in the *echtrai*, a type of mythic narrative in which "the mortal hero visits a supernatural palace, is hospitably entertained, witnesses strange happenings, and sometimes wakes in the morning to find that his host and his dwelling have disappeared" (Loomis 47). Evidently, Perceval's adventures at the Fisher King's castle are quite similar. The young knight, as he journeys back home, finds a wide river he cannot cross, for in a distance of at least twenty leagues there are no bridges available to the hero. He finds two men instead. They are sitting on a small boat, and one of them is fishing. He invites Perceval to take shelter in his lodgings for the night and, in that precise moment, amidst a nearly deserted landscape—that is in, the middle of a literal *waste* land—appears the high tower of a castle. Then, Perceval is received in what may be considered to all extents "a supernatural palace" (Loomis 47), and, as a hero in an *echtrai*, he witnesses strange happenings:

> As they were speaking of one thing and another, a squire came forth from a chamber carrying a white lance by the middle of its shaft; he passed between the fire and those seated upon the bed. Everyone in the hall saw the white lance with its white point from whose tip there issued a drop of blood, and this red drop flowed down to the squire's hand. (…) Then two other squires entered holding in their hands candelabra of pure gold, crafted with enamel inlays. The young men carrying the candelabra were extremely handsome. In each of the candelabra there were at least the candles burning. A maiden accompanying the two young men was carrying a grail with her two hands; she was beautiful, noble, and richly attired. After she had entered the hall carrying the grail the room was so brightly illumined that the candles lost their brilliance like stars and the moon when the sun rises. (…) The grail passed by like the lance; they passed in front of the bed and into another chamber. The young knight watched them pass by but did not dare ask who was served from the grail. (…) [H]e kept more silent than he should have, because with each course that was served he saw the grail pass by completely uncovered before him. But he did not learn who was served from it, thought he wanted to know. (de Troyes 420-421).

The following morning, in keeping with the Irish prototype described by Loomis, Perceval is astonished when he realizes that there is no one left in the castle. He decides to leave with the intention of continuing his journey, when suddenly he finds "a maiden crying, weeping and lamenting, as though she were a woman in great distress" (423). In

her distress, as she holds in her arms a knight "whose head had been cut off" (423), she intuits that Perceval has spent the night at the Fisher King's castle, and thus she explains:

> 'Good sir, I can assure you that he is a king, but he was wounded and maimed in the course of a battle so that he can no longer manage on his own, for he was struck by a javelin through both thighs and is still in so much pain that he cannot ride a horse. Whenever he wants to relax or to go out to enjoy himself, he has himself put in a boat and goes fishing with a hook: this is why he's called the Fisher King.' (424)

According to the maiden's tale, the Fisher King is maimed, and his genital wound has brought about the desolation of his kingdom as a consequence. If Perceval had asked about the meaning of the lance and the grail that he saw at the castle, he "would have brought great succour to the good king who is maimed: he would have totally regained the use of his limbs and ruled his lands, and much good would have come of it!" (425). The foundational principles of the Arthurian Waste Land myth are hereby clearly established. All through the Middle Ages the myth will continue to be represented, rewritten and reinterpreted, but the core meaning of the tale—the mystical, inextricable connection between the divine king and his kingdom—will remain invariable in all pre-modern versions of the tale. It will however be recurrently (and subversively) challenged in post-medieval reutilizations of the myth in literature, which will be explored in detail throughout this study.

As it has been established, nonetheless, the pre-modern Arthurian myth of the Grail mirrors the narrative pattern of the Irish *echtrai* in a way that reinforces the ideological foundations that sustained the narrative in twelfth-century France. It is then appropriate to examine the clearest prototypes of the Waste Land itself in the alleged sources that Loomis advances, specifically *The Aventure of Art Son of Conn* and the *Mabinogi* of *Manawydan* (Loomis 223). The first one is an *echtra*, the latter a Welsh prose medieval tale. In the Irish *echtra*, King Conn of Tara marries an evil woman, Becuma, and, consequently, his kingdom becomes a wasteland: "Conn and Becuma were a year a together in Tara, and there was neither corn nor milk in Ireland during that time (…) the druids related to the king of Tara and the nobles of Ireland the cause of the evil: because of the depravity of Conn's wife and her unbelief it was sent" (Cross par. 10-11). To restore his kingdom to its prosperity, King Conn embarks on a journey that takes him to a mysterious island where he indeed finds a supernatural palace in which

he witnesses again marvellous happenings. There is no grail, but Conn finds a mysterious Grail-like horn: "food-laden boards of the house with varied meats rose up before him, and he knew not who had given them to him. After a short space he saw a drinking-horn there, and he knew not who had fetched the horn" (par. 18-19).

Even though the objective of this reassessment of the Grail legend's alleged origins is to introduce the prototypes of the Waste Land mytheme, given the primary significance of the mythical element for this study, it may be clarifying to note that Loomis in fact recognizes the Grail's earliest prototype in the dish of Rhydderch, one of the Thirteen Treasures of the Island of Britain. The magical property of this talisman was that "whatever food one wished thereon was instantly obtained" (Loomis 58), and, as Loomis explains, a similar vessel was in fact in possession of Brân the Blessed, the Welsh counterpart of the Fisher King in the *Mabinogion*, whose court of immortal knights feasted endlessly for eighty years (59). Following Mac Cana and Newstead, John Carey summarizes Brân's characteristics in a list of ten features, two of which are that, "he is famous for his joyous feasts" (67), and "a food-producing vessel was attributed to him" (68). According to Newstead, this vessel corresponds to yet another of the royal treasures of Britain: a drinking horn (in Carey 68). There would be then two Grail prototypes in Welsh mythology: a drinking-horn and a dish of plenty. Even though today it is highly contested that, as Loomis's claimed, the mistranslation of 'horn' into 'body' (because the Old French nominative form for both words in the same: *li cors*) actually accounts for the representation of the Grail as containing the Corpus Christi in the romances following Chrétien (Loomis 60-61), the need for this (perhaps far-fetched) argument in fact embodies the *radical* transformation undergone by the Grail myth already in the Middle Ages, from an ideological standpoint. For, as it seems, what started being represented as a token of plenty in pagan feasts quickly morphed into the sacred container of the Holy Body of Jesus Christ (Corpus Christi).

Yet the representation of the Grail as a food provider is actually perpetuated in medieval romance, and in truth, the continued and far-reaching reinterpretation of this nourishing property allows for the ideological transformation that establishes the mystical relationship between the Maimed King, the Waste Land, and the (eventually Holy) Grail. The Grail, meant to *feed* the king, must also feed the kingdom, because "as the keeper goes, so goes the land" (Segal xx, in Weston 1993). But this communitarian sustenance provided by the Grail only grows more and more spiritual in nature as Christian romances transform the myth. Significantly, the evolution from the dream-

world magical feasts in the alleged pagan sources into the saintly representations of the Grail in the later romances is expressively depicted in one of the key medieval sources of the Waste Land myth: Wolfram Von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, composed between 1200 and 1210 by a Bavarian knight-poet. Eloquently, in this romance, the first appearance of the Grail in the castle of "the sorrowing king" (Eschenbach 135) is cognate with the pagan feasts found in Irish and Welsh mythologies, and yet the Grail is represented as explicitly holy:

> … whatever one stretched out one's hand for in the presence of the Gral (…) one found it all ready and to hand—dishes warm, dishes cold, new-fangled dishes and old favourites, the meat of beasts both tame and wild… for the Gral was the very fruit of bliss, a cornucopia of the sweets of this world (…) whatever drink a man could name, be it mulberry wine, wine or ruby, by virtue of the Gral he could see it there in his cup. (126-7)

Whereas in Chrétien the sanctity of the Grail is only addressed towards the end of the romance and in very ambiguous terms when Percival's uncle explains that "a single host that is brought to him in that grail sustains and brings comfort to that holy man—such is the holiness of the grail!" (Troyes 460), in Eschenbach the holiness of the Grail is made explicit, in spite of the marvellous, pagan-reminiscent feast already described. In fact, the conception of the Grail as a pagan talisman of plenty and as a sacred container of the Corpus Christi is reconciled quite harmoniously in the German romance: "Every Good Friday (…) the Dove brings it [=a white Wafer] to the Stone [=the Grail], from which the Stone receives all that is good on earth of food and drink, of paradisal excellence—I mean whatever the earth yields" (Eschenbach 2980: 240). The food-producing properties of the Grail have been thoroughly Christianized, yet they remain *food*-producing properties, that is, the Grail remains a magical object that ensures the land's fertility in a very literal sense. However, by the time the Waste Land myth is recounted in English, which as it will be explained further on happens in the fifteenth century, the nurturing virtue of the Grail has been codified as strictly spiritual. The Maimed King's castle has become the place where "the holy meat shall be departed" (Malory II 364). The knights do not feast on endless dishes, but kneel down before the Holy Vessel, surrounded by angels, to receive their Saviour. The *Holy* Grail is still defined by its nourishing properties, hence allowing for the argument of an existing continuum of meaning between medieval myth and its alleged Celtic sources. Yet this meaning is transformed, as the plight of the Blighted Land and its need for

restoration transforms as well. It is only the medieval romances that connect, ideologically, the king's *wound* and the suffering of his kingdom; and it is in medieval romance that the affliction of the land transforms—from social chaos, to barrenness, to a state of spiritual degeneration in the later versions—while the king's genital wound actually remains the same.

It is this process of reinterpretation of the Waste Land mytheme itself that articulates the ideological turn entailed by the medieval (Holy) Grail; a turn cognate with what the anthropologist A. M. Hocart defined as the "revolution in mythology" brought about by Christianity, for "a Christian may be lusty and strong, yet, in the words of Malory, 'dead of sin'" (Hocart 26). The Grail's prime function is no longer to feed a divine king, but to provide sustenance, in effect physical and spiritual, to the dispossessed that inhabit the mythical Waste Land. And it is this notion that in fact allows for the revaluation of the Waste Land myth as a myth of restoration; in this view, the communitarian (spiritual) regeneration brought about by the Grail in the later romances arguably constitutes the medieval ideological reinterpretation of the marvellous, dream-world feasts found in the proposed sources.

As mentioned, one of these alleged sources is *Manawydan*, the Third Branch of the Mabinogion, which presents striking similarities with the Arthurian myth of the Waste Land. John Carey explains:

> The way which Perceval follows to the Grail castle, and the splendours which he finds there, can as we have seen be compared with elements in the early Irish tale of Conn's journey to an Otherworld stronghold. But the castle stands in a waste place far from other human habitation, the realm of the Fisher King is blighted, and Perceval's own visit is shadowed by misfortune: for these features of the story, so important to the Grail legend as a whole, the closest counterparts are to be found in the Third Branch of the *Mabinogi*. (108)

Carey refers to the story of Manawydan, a disinherited king whose cousin has usurped his power and who travels to the kingdom of Dyfed, in south Wales, to accept his friend Pryderi's offer: that Manawydan marries Pryderi's mother, Rhiannon, thus becoming king of Dyfed. But after a brief time of peace and prosperity, misfortune happens. There is a magical mound in Dyfed the First Branch describes as follows: "it is the property (*kynnedyf*) of the Mound that whatever nobleman (*dylydauc*) may sit upon it, he will not go thence without one of two things: either bruising or wounds, or else he will see a marvel" (qt. in Carey 99). This Mound indeed affects Manawydan:

> As they were seated thus, suddenly there was a clap of thunder and, with such a great clap of thunder, a fall of mist so that no-one could see anyone else. After the mist, everywhere [was filled] with bright light. And when they looked where before they would have seen flocks and herds and dwellings, they could see nothing at all: neither house, nor animal, nor smoke, nor fire, nor man, nor dwellings: [nothing] except the empty buildings of the court, deserted, uninhabited, without man or beast with them (…) 'Alas, Lord God.' Said Manawydan 'is the host of the court and our host nothing but this? Let us go and look.' They came to the hall—there was nobody. They made for the chamber and the sleeping house—none did they see. Neither in the mead cellar nor the kitchen was there anything except desolation. (Parker par. 27-9)

Curiously enough the mystical tone of the passage finds an echo in Chrétien de Troyes's romance. After Perceval first encounters the Fisher King on the boat he inquires him about possible lodgings for the night. The following happens:

> And he replied: (…) 'I'll give you lodging tonight. Go up through that cleft cut into the rock, and when you reach the top you'll see in a valley before you a house where I live, near the river and woods.
> The young knight climbed until he reached the top of the hill; and when he was at the top, he looked all around him and saw only sky and earth, and said: 'What have I come for? Deceit and trickery! May God bring shame today on him who sent me here. He sent me on a wild goose chase when he told me I'd see a house when I came up here! Fisherman, you did me great dishonour when you told me this, if you said it out of malice!'
> Then, in a valley before him, he caught sight of the top of a tower. From there to Beirut you could not find a finer or better situated one. (de Troyes 418).

The comparison between both passages allows for the already explained argument that, during the twelfth century, Betron troubadours adapted the Welsh legendary tradition—which was partly made up of Irish mythological remnants—and collected it in their romances. From Loomis's perspective, the circumstance accounts for a historical process that he defines as 'euhemerism', by means of which the pagan deities of mythology came to be replaced in Christianity by divine or quasi-divine monarchs (24). In Loomis's own words, euhemerism may be defined as "the tendency to interpret myths as history, which prevailed throughout Europe in the transition from paganism to Christianity" (24). Arthurian mythology transformed the Irish mythic gods that inhabit supernatural palaces into kings whose divine nature is made manifest in the mystical bond that connects them sympathetically to their lands. Such mystical bond determines that the fertility and prosperity of the land ultimately depends upon the king's vitality,

so that, in effect, Arthurian mythology operates as a legitimizing force, thus justifying the contemporary political institutions it represents, which gets achieved by presupposing the mythical and, more to the point, mystical nature of monarchy. Such ideological foundation of the Waste Land myth effectively explains its prominence and varied forms of representation in medieval romances.

In the same way as the Irish mythological deities of the *echtrai* are arguably replaced by archetypically-medieval divine kings in Arthurian tradition, the Grail itself, as it was already—albeit briefly—explained, evolves from being represented as a magical talisman that nurtures and illuminates into becoming the Holy Chalice, a sacred relic from Christ's passion. The transformation takes place in Robert de Boron's *Jospeh d'Arimathie,* dated from soon after de Troyes's composition of *Perceval*. Carey explains:

> [I]t appears most reasonable to suppose, that having been struck (and perhaps disturbed) by Chrétien's description of the 'so holy thing', Robert set out to account for the Grail's origin and nature—situation in this time unequivocally within the framework of sacred history, as the fragmentary account in the *Conte del Graal* had conspicuously failed to do. (138)

Persuevisely, Cary manages to once again harmonize the discrepancies between the works of de Troyes and de Boron by taking into consideration the Breton legendary tradition. In Robert de Boron's poem, the Grail Knight and the Fisher King (The 'Rich Fisher' in *Joseph*) are related through the male line; in de Troyes, their kinship is matrilineal.[3] Yet Carey argues:

> Chrétien relates that Perceval's father was wounded 'between the legs', and that his lands became desolate thereafter; Robert says that the father of the destined recipient of the Grail (presumably Pecerval) was named Alein.[4] Walter Map tells

[3] The fact that the relationship between the Grail Knight and the Fisher King can be decoded in terms of inheritance will be of paramount importance when analyzed in late-medieval and post-medieval representations of the Waste Land myth, once the narrative pattern of mythical healing is insistently displaced into pattern of royal succession.

[4] Allein is actually the son of (He)Bron, the original Fisher-King figure in the text. It seems noteworthy that in this case, the character associated with castration is not the Rich Fisher or Fisher King in de Boron, but his son Alein. Towards the end of de Troyes's *Perceval*, the hermit will explain to Perceval that "'[W]hen you did not inquire who is served from the grail, you committed folly. The man served from it is my brother. Your mother was his sister and mine; and the *rich* Fisher King, I believe, is the son of the king who is served from the grail" (460, my italics). As it can be observed, already in de Troyes one may distinguish two wounded kings; three, if Perceval's own father—who also ruled over a wasted state—is taken into consideration. As it will be explained in this introduction, this constant repetition of Fisher-King figures as fathers, sons, and even grandson is frequent in all Arthurian romances, and it introduces

> the tale of a ruler named Alan, whose castration caused what amounted to barrenness in the territory in which the act was perpetrated. Map was, for what it is worth, writing at just the time when it seems likeliest that Chrétien composed the *Conte*. (142)

Other similarities that may be traced between Robert de Boron's poem and the Welsh mythological tradition—such as the analogy between the Rich Fisher's name, Bron, and the name of the Second Branch's character Brân—are not as critical for a comparative analysis of Boron's and Troyes's texts as the presence of the reiterative pattern that associates the king's castration with the wasting of the land. As it can be observed in the previous explanation offered by Carey, once the explicit Christianization of the Grail as been initiated, and the Grail begins to be represented as the Holy Chalice of Christ's Last Supper, the prominence of the Waste Land and the Maimed King as core mythemes of the Arthurian tale remains unchanged. Such is clearly the case featured in the only Arthurian source composed in English that collects the entire Arthurian canon, Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, a collection of several romances edited together by William Caxton in 1485 as a book. These late romances substantiate how, towards the end of the fifteenth century, the ancient pagan myth—associated by most Arthurian critics to primeval fertility rites, as it will be explained in the next section of this introduction—has completely transformed into a specific episode in the history of a religious relic.

The definitive step in this Christianization of the story of the Grail takes places in two volumes of the *Vulgate Cycle*: the *Estoire del Saint Grial* and the *Queste del Saint Graal*, both composed after Boron's poem and which are the source material for Malory's Grail Quest.[5] The quest gives an account of the story of King Arthur's knights

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the notion of inheritance as a key concept to interpret the myth and to reinterpret it later in post-medieval recreations of the tale.

[5] The *Vulgate Cycle* is a large and vast cyclic work in prose, hugely popular and, even though originally composed in French, written in several other languages too. It seems to have been composed between 1215 and 1230, perhaps in the country of Champagne, and certainly in the Continent, it seems that by several different authors (Loomis 146-147). The relevance of this source for the study of the Waste Land myth is that, as Loomis explains, interwoven with the main narrative pattern that recounts Lancelot's passion for Guenevere and its effects on the downfall of Camelot and the order of the Round Table, in the *Vulgate* appears "a version of the Grail legend very different from any of those previously [composed] (…) It is the version best known to British and American readers since Malory included a felicitous and abridged translation of a large part in his book, and so passed this form of the Grail legend on to Tennyson" (147). As Vinaver notes, it is "a singularly perfect example of thirteenth-century narrative art, subordinate to a well-defined principle of composition and maintaining in all its branches a remarkable sense of cohesion" (VII). As Malory's is the best-known version of the Arthurian cycle in the Anglo-American tradition, his translation of the *Vulgate* material into a work that is built upon "the principle of 'singleness' which underlies the normal structure of a modern work of fiction" (Vinaver VIII) is indeed

in Camelot: they must find the holy relic in order to heal the Maimed King and restore the Waste Land that he governs. Initially, Malory informs: "there was a king that hight Pelles, [who was] the Maimed King" (Malory II 337). Like de Troyes's Fisher King, King Pelles, has suffered an injury in the thighs; yet he was not wounded in battle, but trying to obtain a mysterious sword: "so therewith entered a spear wherewith he was smit him through both the thighs, and never sith might he be healed" (337). A few chapters later, however, King Pelles and his son leave King Arthur's knights in the Castle of Carboneck, where they find a second maimed king: "a good man sick [with] a crown of gold upon his head" (364). Tracing Malory's source for this story, the *Quest del Saint Graal*, it can be deduced that the second Maimed King is in fact King Pellam (King Pelles's father), whose story is told in Book 2 of *Le Morte D'Arthur*. According to this account, King Pellam is in fact injured in battle, when Sir Balin wounds him with a magical spear: the same spear the soldier Longinus used to pierce Christ's side after the crucifixion. Beyond the proliferation of holy relics that pervade the tale in this late stage, the relevance of this episode resides in the fact that it once again reproduces the core meaning of the Waste Land myth. Sir Balin, as he escapes King Pellam's castle, "rode forth through the fair countries and cities, and found the people dead, slain on every side. And all that were alive cried, 'O Balin, thou hast caused great damage in these countries; for the dolorous stroke though gavest unto King Pellam, three countries are destroyed'" (Malory I 84). The previous excerpt describes the first of several representations of the Waste Land in Malory's romances, as in fact King Pellam is the son of King Labor, whose death in battle brought about a terrible plague, desolating his realm, "for sithen increased neither corn, ne grass, nor well-nigh no fruit, ne in the water was no fish: wherefore men callen it (…) the Waste Land" (II 334).

In his analysis of the *Estoire del Saint Grail*, Malory's other main source, Loomis explains that King Pellam is actually the last member in a list of four different characters who suffer a castrating wound: Josephes, Joseph of Arimathea, King Alphasan and Pelleham (Pellam in Malory's romances) (247). Malory adds a fifth character, King Pelles, thus introducing three Maimed Kings in *Le Morte D'Arthur*: King Labor, his son King Pellam, and the latter's son, King Pelles. In all cases, the prosperity of their kingdoms and the fertility of their lands depend upon the strength and virility of the king. Hence the three kings can be construed as three different

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crucial for a better understanding of post-medieval representation of the Grail legend in British and American literature.

representations of Chrétien de Troyes's Fisher King, that is, the prototypical Maimed King of Arthurian mythology. Thus, to sum up this brief account of the most relevant medieval representations of the Waste Land myth, it can be argued that between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries varied representations of the Arthurian myth may be traced in different romances, which results in a changeable tradition that is ultimately compiled in English in Thomas Malory's romances.

THE THEORY

As it will be explored throughout this study, of all the schools of thought that have analyzed Arthurian mythology, the most relevant for the aims of this research is the 'myth and ritual' school. This school, also known as the Cambridge Ritualists, were a group of classical scholars who, in the decade before First World War, applied James G. Frazer's theory of myth and ritual to classical mythology and early forms of classical drama (Segal *Theorizing* 49). Some years later, a contemporary of the Cambridge Ritualists, Jessie Weston, applied the myth and ritual theory to the study of the Grail Legend in her seminal book *From Ritual to Romance* (1920), which, as it will be explained, heavily influenced T. S. Eliot's representation of the Waste Land myth in *The Waste Land* (1922), and thus determined the course of the twentieth-century representation of the myth. As such, myth-ritualistic interpretations (and reinterpretations) of the Waste Land myth will be explored in depth in the course of this dissertation; for the purposes of this introduction it is enough to note that, from the perspective of myth-ritualism, "literature harks back to myths that were originally the scripts of the key primitive ritual of regularly killing and replacing the king in order to ensure crops for the community" (Segal *Theorizing* 44).

This myth-ritualistic perspective that connects the Waste Land myth with ancient fertility rites is certainly the most important myth-critical school that has studied the Waste Land myth throughout the twentieth century, along with the study of Arthurian scholars such as Loomis and Carey who have attempted to locate the origins of the myth in Irish mythology through a contrastive study of Arthurian mythology and the Welsh legends. The perspective of these authors is clearly crucial for a coherent and cohesive presentation of the myth as intended in this introduction, but the myth-ritualistic

approach to the Waste Land myth is undoubtedly the most useful critical tool for the myth-critical perspective adopted by the whole of this study, due to several reasons. First of all, it is necessary to take into consideration the influence that the publication of Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* had upon the twentieth-century literary representations of the myth, uncontested by any other scholarly analysis of the Grail romances. Its influence is decisive for how it makes possible the rather transgressive reinterpretation of the myth during the twentieth century, which is due to two main causes. The first is the fact that Weston's book constitutes a critical revolution in the field of Arthurian Studies. For the first time, the story of the Grail is critically dissociated from Christianity, for indeed the Christian interpretation of the myth had been the dominant critical perspective since the Middle Ages. Weston's book hypothesizes however that the Waste Land myth is only the literary evolution of an ancient fertility rite. Such a claim of course originates—as do all myth-ritualistic interpretations of mythology—in James G. Frazer's extraordinarily influential *The Golden Bough* (1890), an anthropological study of myth and religion that advanced the hypothesis that all myths emerge as the narrative transposition (as either a script or an explanation) of ritual ceremonies. The primeval ritual described by Frazer is a rite during which the tribal king—whose body is believed to lodge the spirit of the god of vegetation, according to the second branch of myth-ritualism[6]—is sacrificed by the tribal community when he falls ill or when his strength diminishes.[7] This sacrifice, magically bound to the passage of the seasons, is teleologically aimed to warrant the restoration of the crops in springtime, since, in Frazer's hypothesis, all primeval cultures held the belief that the fertility of the land depended upon the strength and vigour of the king. Consequently, in Weston's perspective, the Waste Land myth stems from such primitive belief, a claim that, in 1920, detaches the Arthurian myth from the Christian tradition in which it had been interwoven for centuries. The already-described process that arguably took place during the Middle Ages, that is, the Christianization of the Grail, so to speak, is thus reversed: a myth that had been codified as inherently Christian for centuries is re-codified at the beginning of the twentieth century as a pagan myth. This circumstance is carried through to the literary representation of the myth, most visibly of course in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, directly and heavily influenced by Weston's critical exploration of the Grail legend.

[6] For a more complete explanation of Frazer's hypothesis, see p. 175.
[7] See Frazer, Chapter XXIV, "The Killing of the Divine King" (pp. 308-329).

The second cause that determines the crucial influence of Weston's, and, by extension, the myth-ritualistic interpretation of the Waste Land myth, is undoubtedly the expansion of mythical referents brought about by the assertion that the origin of the myth may be traced to a ritual of sacrifice. Such is in fact the literary transposition of the myth-and-ritual critical approach to mythology. If one subscribes to the argument that the tribal sacrifice of the divine king constitutes the origin of the medieval myth of the Waste Land, in the process of literary representation, such a sacrifice, along with the many symbolic and thematic elements that appeal to ritualistic magic, becomes part of the set of textual referents that represent the myth in question. From this perspective, as it will be analyzed in depth in the third part of the dissertation, ritual signifiers such as vegetation rites and deities, Tarot cards, or bullfights, may in truth be interpreted as textual motifs that ultimately give shape to the literary representation of the Waste Land myth in different texts. Adopting Weston's Frazerian myth-ritualistic approach to the Waste Land, one cannot but assume the ritual substratum of romance as a literary mode. Consequently, the ritual components and references of a particular text cannot but be considered as constituents *ab origine* of the Arthurian myth as represented and reinterpreted in post-medieval literature.

Another reason why this study will mostly focus, theoretically, on the myth-ritualistic interpretation of the Waste Land myth is that, in fact, the ritualistic interpretation of myth clearly emphasizes its social and communitarian function. From the myth-ritualistic perspective of Frazer and Weston, myth acquires an obvious magical and religious dimension. It is thus established that the teleology of myth, insofar as it develops from an ancestral ritual structure, is to warrant the survival of the community, for such is the purpose of tribal magic. Having this in mind, it is far from absurd to argue that, in fact, the medieval version of the myth narrates a tale of communal restoration, legitimizing the ideology that guarantees the perpetuation of the status quo and, supposedly, the commonwealth. Nevertheless, as it will be closely analysed throughout this study, the myth as it is represented and subversively reinterpreted in literature in fact certifies the impossibility of such communal restoration, disclosing such mythical teleology as merely the ideological construct enforced by the dominant and authoritative classes.

The final reason why the myth-and-ritual school of thought is the preferred theory of mythology in this study is that, within the tradition of Arthurian scholarship, only the myth-ritualistic interpretation of the Waste Land myth has placed the critical emphasis

on the Waste Land itself as the fundamental mytheme that carries the core meaning of the tale.[8] Such a critical phenomenon explains, on the one hand, the preferred denomination of the myth as 'Waste Land myth'—rather than 'Grail myth' or 'Fisher King myth'—that will be used throughout this study. More to the point, it allows for a clearer elucidation of the relevance of the myth in the Anglo-American literary tradition, which in turn permits a deeper understanding of the ideological functionality of the myth itself. For indeed, literary representations of the Waste Land myth across tradition have repeatedly emphasized the plight of the Waste Land over other narrative components of the tale so as to convey a set of social, political and ideological concerns, which have greatly benefitted from the symbolization of the myth-ritualistic understanding of mythology. This critical approach, as explained, relates the welfare of the land (and thus, metonymically, of the community) to the vitality and strength of the king, thus connecting the social need for political order to the life forces of nature and cosmology. Such presupposed correspondence between the natural and the social spheres of human existence underlies the legitimizing purpose of mythology, and as such, as this study seeks to demonstrate, it has been subversively represented across the literary tradition so as to undercut the dominant ideologies articulated by a myth that rhetorically perpetuates the socio-political status quo.

For these reasons, the present study recurrently takes into consideration the hypotheses advanced by myth-ritualistic scholars. It is not because, from the perspective of this research, such hypotheses constitute a truer or more correct interpretation of mythopoetic thought, but because, as explained, myth-ritualism had a decisive influence in the *literary* representation of the Waste Land myth. The point of this dissertation is not to analyze different myth-critical approaches and to select one among the many as the optimal methodological approach to explore the 'true' nature and meaning of mythology. On the contrary, the present study will incorporate many of the most eloquent arguments proposed by a significant number of different myth-critics, who, along the decades, have formulated different hypotheses about the functions and purposes of mythopoeia in general and of Arthurian mythology in particular. However, such theoretical and critical arguments will be applied in all cases to a close reading of the selected corpus of literary texts to be explored throughout this study. The aim is to advance a critical hypothesis about the immanence of mythical meaning in literature,

[8] See p. 188

that is, the socially-constructed and ideologically-conditioned meaning of mythology, as well as its inevitable reinterpretation through the process of literary representation and recreation.

THE WORKS

The first part of the present study will analyze the remnants of medieval mythology in early modern political drama in England, by focusing on exploring how both the structure and the ideological foundation of the Waste Land myth—arguably the myth of romance par excellence, as it will be argued in much detail throughout this study—remain meaningful and functional in Renaissance drama, and yet are challenged by historical counter-discourses that exploit and remake mythology so as to articulate the social and political concerns of a convulsed time period that is best defined in terms of political instability, tumultuous social change, and philosophical uncertainties. Such political, social and philosophical circumstances arguably trigger a process of mythical change in the modes of representation, from the Middle Ages into the Renaissance, which, as the first part of this dissertation will seek to demonstrate, is made manifest in the representation of several Maimed-King figures and Waste Lands to be found, more or less explicitly, in some of the key plays of early modern political drama in England. Arguably, this mythical change entails the symbolic banishment from Eden of the emerging British nation that is codified in terms of a replacement of ritual by history as a means to know and represent a changing world.

The first chapter of the dissertation thus explores the symbolic and mythical remnants of medieval mythology in Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II* (ca. 1592), and hence initiates the main argument of this study, which hypothesizes that the Waste Land myth—a pre-modern myth of socio-political restoration that operates as symbolic correlative of a dominant, legitimizing political discourse on royal authority—is represented subversively in several key works of the literary canon in English so as to undercut its core ideological foundation: the naturalization of certain power structures—most specifically monarchy, in the case of the earliest representations of the myth—as constituting the socio-political mirror and continuum of the preternatural order of the natural world. For the mythical structure of *Edward II* operates as a correlative of a

legitimizing discourse on royal authority only partially; the dramatic movement of the play presents a mythical re-activation similar to the themes and structures found in romance mythology, but the thematic and symbolic revision of the Waste Land myth in the play—especially as it pertains to the dramatic representation of violence and the adaptation of the mythical structure to the dramatic and symbolic parameters of tragedy—is in fact inherently subversive. In the basis of this subversive reinterpretation of the myth, *Edward II* presents the first ideological contestation to the legitimizing discourse of the myth in the post-medieval history of the Waste Land myth in English, by exposing the naturalized violence and cruelty of the historical processes that perpetuate the permanence and reinforcement of modern absolutist monarchies, as these monarchies rhetorically exploit romance myths as an ideological strategy of legitimization.

Once established the core interplay of dominant mythical discourse and subversive counter-discourse that regulate symbolic representation in early modern political drama, the second chapter of this study will examine the already-mentioned transition from ritual to history as a cognitive means to represent the world in William Shakespeare's *Richard II* (ca. 1595). Aiming to reassess traditional interpretations of the play which have considered it to represent kingship in keeping with the Myth of Order that legitimized the power structures of Tudor England, this chapter will argue that the characterization of King Richard as a weak and arguably castrated mythical king—thus emulating the Fisher King of romance mythology—in fact constitutes a subversive recreation of pre-modern mythology which, for the first time explicitly, exposes how the superimposition of mythical structures (and ideologies) on historical events, meant to articulate the dramatization of such events, cannot legitimize—let alone redeem—the violence inherent to such historical processes and to the power structures that those historical processes perpetuate so often through violence. Thus the Waste Land myth can be argued to appear for the first time in Shakespeare's historical play as the symbolic correlative of a power discourse that proves to be entirely futile to restore a socio-political order which, in a historical context that seeks to legitimize the political consequences of a civil war, is dramatized as utterly irreparable and unredeemable.

The third and final chapter of the first part also analyzes the process of representation and reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth in a deeply political Renaissance play, but in this case, the focus of the study shifts from the subgenre of historical drama to the genre—or rather, the *mode*—of romance. The 'mode' of

romance is explored in terms of its pre-modern tradition and its early-modern evolution, and how such mode is reinterpreted in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (ca. 1610), a play that is discursively shaped by the legitimizing myths of royal authority, much in the same way that the historical plays are. Thus the chapter carries out a myth-critical interpretation of *The Tempest* that explores the reinterpreted myth of the Waste Land in a sort of deconstructive reading that, supported by the critical hypotheses of New Historicism and postcolonial studies, aims to dismantle the ideological presupposition of the medieval myth; that is to say, the allegedly unquestionable preternatural identification between the political order and the natural order. Subsequently, this chapter argues that the explicit degenerative representation of the Waste Land myth in *The Tempest*—carried out by means of exposing the artificiality of romance as a literary artefact—effectively accounts for the social and political concerns of the new historical and philosophical context that follows Queen Elizabeth I's death and the conflictive installation of the Stuart dynasty to the throne of England.

Continuing the myth-critical exploration of the literary representations of the Waste Land myth, the second part of the dissertation analyzes the tradition of British romance during the nineteenth century, taking also into consideration the origins of the so-called 'Romance Revival' in the eighteenth century. The aim of this part of the research is to demonstrate that the evolution of the romance mode in this particular context brings about an unavoidable reinterpretation of romance mythology in general, and, specifically, of the Waste Land myth. Such a process of mythical reinterpretation—linked to the last chapter of the first part of this study insofar as it is based upon the subversion of romance ideology—reaches its climax, as it will be argued, in the process of (subversive) mythologization of modernism. In order to articulate such a hypothesis, this second part of the dissertation traces the 'progress' of romance in Britain in the nineteenth-century, analyzing two instances of historical romance, one of medievalist romance and, lastly, the most paradigmatic example of imperial romance. The study of these works will seek to demonstrate a progressive and unstoppable transmutation of the mode of romance into the form of anti-romance, which is made manifest in the degeneration (and thus, subversive) reinterpretation of the myths that this literary mode contains. Particularly, of course, this study focuses on the subversive representation of the Waste Land myth, aiming to expose how this representation gives account of the emerging ideological crisis that may be traced in the conflicting discourses and counter-discourses articulated by some of the key texts of the British literary canon.

The fourth chapter of this dissertation analyzes two instances of historical romance, as mentioned. Its title is 'Historical Romance: Reconstruction of Romance in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* and Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley*', and, as it can be inferred from the title, contains two parts. The first one, significantly shorter, provides a brief theoretical frame about the British 'Romance Revival' that characterized the mid-eighteenth-century British literary scene, along with a myth-critical exploration of Walpole's foundational *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). The aim of this part of the research is to examine the revival and reconstruction process by means of which medieval romance is represented in a very faithful, almost literal manner in the eighteenth century, so as to expose how such a 'literal' revival in fact cannot escape the influence of the already-explored subversive tradition of Renaissance mythopoeia. The Romance Revival of the eighteenth century thus carries a dissonant ideology with regards to the medieval myths that are represented and reinterpreted in the texts, a circumstance that is crucial to understanding subsequent processes of mythical representation and reinterpretation in the tradition of British romance in the following century.

One clear example of such processes of ideologically subversive mythical reinterpretation is Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814), which will be analyzed in depth in the second part of this fourth chapter. This part aims to explore the mythical parameters that structure the foundational Scottish novel as a rather complex Grail narrative, in which, once again, the mythical tale—giving shape to two parallel and yet divergent romances—is superimposed on a narrative that recounts two historical events, namely: a civil war, and a subsequent process of cultural and political colonization. As it may be intuited, this instance of mythical representation brings about a rather transgressive reinterpretation of the pre-modern myth, which is reshaped in the novel so as to expose the re-appropriation of romance and romance mythology (and ideology) as a strategy of legitimization for the dominant classes in England. In doing so, and as it will be explained in detail, *Waverley* subverts the ideological presuppositions of the Waste Land myth, which is in fact represented as the mythical correlative of a narrative of cultural loss, that is, as the reconstructed romance that retells the story of England's colonizing dominion over the Scottish Highlands.

The second chapter of this part (fifth chapter overall) explores the degenerative reinterpretation of Arthurian romance in Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (1856-9 and 1868-74), even though it evidently focuses on the representation of the

Waste Land myth in the poems. Significantly, in Tennyson's Victorian collection of romances, the reinterpretation of the Waste Land is not limited to the explicit representation of the Grail myth, which is of course contained in the poems; on the contrary, as it will be hypothesized during the chapter, the *Idylls* rewrite the entire Arthurian canon—that is, the story of the foundation, growth and eventual downfall of Camelot as a social and political ideal—as a symbol of the Waste Land myth. Thus the ideal of Camelot, symbolically configured as the mythical Waste Land—functions simultaneously as the metaphoric and metonymic correlative of contemporary Victorian England and, consequently, it articulates, mythically, the political, ideological and philosophical anxieties that initiate the transmutation of medieval romance into 'culturally-modern' anti-romance, which will be finalized irrevocably by the mythical reinterpretation of imperial romance.

The best-known imperial romance of the British literary canon is arguably Joseph Conrad's pre-modernist *Heart of Darkness* (1898), which will be analyzed in the sixth chapter of this dissertation. The aim of this chapter is to explore a myth-critical interpretation of Conrad's novella that hypothesizes that the text in fact constitutes a romance of degeneration. Such argument, in the context of this study, is crucial to understand the processes of mythical reinterpretation that characterize Anglo-American modernism, inasmuch as such processes are clearly prefigured in *Heart of Darkness*. Modernist mythopoeia, as it will be examined in the following part of this dissertation, assumes as inescapable the *degenerative* reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth, and such reinterpretation is most eloquently realized in Conrad's text. Taking into consideration the anthropological influences that shape the novella, and which will become even more prominent in the literature of post-war modernism, the aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how the Waste Land myth, that is, the archetypical pattern of the Grail narrative, is transformed through a process of literary representation to articulate a 'degeneration narrative.' This 'degeneration narrative,' which reveals the aesthetic influence of Symbolism, along with the scientific influence exercised by the new discoveries in the field of physics and anthropology, effectively questions and subverts the dominant nineteenth-century power discourses. This results, as the chapter will seek to demonstrate, in a process of mythical revision that articulates in the manner of Symbolism the prophetic announcement of the unprecedented horror looming over the turn of the century, which of course will be fully accounted for in the (already

apocalyptic) mythical reinterpretation of Anglo-American modernism after the First World War.

Such is the object of study of the third part of this research. This part focuses on analyzing the process of representation and reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth in American modernism, and thus explores how the reinterpreted myth gives account of the chaos, anarchy, fragmentation and uncertainty that characterize the modernist *zeitgeist*. For in fact such *zeitgeist* explains the pertinence of the Waste Land myth as a literary motif since, as explained, the Arthurian tale is configured around the themes of sickness, sterility, impotence, sacrificial death and, above all, the hope of restoration for a land that has been laid waste. It seems reasonable to argue that after the unprecedented catastrophe of the Great War, literature recovers the Waste Land myth to symbolically represent the moral, aesthetic, and philosophical concerns of a time defined by chaos, hopelessness and the horrors of war. Of course, this circumstance once again brings about an unavoidable reinterpretation of the mythical material that is represented in the texts, so that in fact the Waste Land myth functions as the governing metaphor and the main structuring device of some of the key texts of post-war modernism, but such representation has as an effect the inevitable *disorder* of myth, as it will be described in detail throughout this study. If myth is reshaped to structure the chaos of modernism, myth cannot but be set in disorder, which of course triggers a process of re-signification: if the core meaningful elements of the myth are rearranged, so is the *meaning* of the myth. As it will be shown in the third part of this dissertation, the modernist rearranging of myth brings about the collapse of its integrating functionality. The Waste Land myth, as reinterpreted in the texts of American modernism, no longer aims at uniting and integrating the community; on the contrary, it operates as a sort of prism that allows for the individuals to apprehend the degenerative (and irreparable) state of the community they live in.

The first chapter of this third part analyzes T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) and it aims to present a strictly myth-critical interpretation of the poem that reassesses the themes of resurrection and regeneration in the text. This theme is indubitably inherent to any representation of the Waste Land myth, but for the first time in Eliot's poem the regenerative ending of the pre-modern myth is explicitly lamented and denounced as an act of cruelty. As it will be explained, the root of such subversive reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth may be located in the modernist manipulation of the principles of mythopoeia so as to replace the eternal recurrence of mythical

cosmogony with a literary artefact that purposefully manipulates myth. Only a myth that has been manipulated can convey the sense of the present, chaotic, anarchic and horrific as it may be. But the eternal recurrence of an over-exposed, somehow *updated* myth is inevitably corrupt, since the regenerative ending of the myth can only resurrect the dead into the life recreated in the new myth, a life that is inescapably chaotic, hopeless, horrible and overwhelmingly cruel.

Such is life in the contemporary world, and as such it is represented in John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), the novel examined in the eighth chapter of this dissertation. In Dos Passos's novel Manhattan functions as the contemporary reincarnation of the mythical Waste Land of the Arthurian legends, and thus it may also be interpreted as a 'symbolist' symbol of a kind, which in fact stands in as the signifier of a far wider and more complex reality than the alienating, dehumanizing city life represented in the novel. For the life of the characters who are trapped, sick, dehumanized and even metaphorically dismembered by the machine of the modern city is not exclusive to life in New York City at the beginning of the twentieth-century, but constitutes the mythical recreation of a Waste Land from which there is no outside and no salvation. The social and political order represented and legitimized in pre-modern mythology has no place in a city where the homogenizing urban mass stands in as the symbol of a time when life is inevitably extinguished without hope, and the individual cannot ever succeed in restoring the welfare to a community that suppresses life and is hence condemned to either lifelessness or complete alienation.

New York is also the modern counterpart of the mythical Waste Land in F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1925 classic, The Great Gatsby, explored in the ninth chapter of this dissertation. As it will be explained, Fitzgerald's novel somehow picks up the tradition of the 'anti-romance' analyzed in the second part of this study, presenting a reversed, perverse reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth in which the Fisher King kills the Grail Knight, in a world where the mere existence of a Grail Knight has condemned the Fisher King to annihilation. The ruling principles that give order and meaning to the Waste Land myth are all present in *The Great Gatsby*, but they are in fact subverted, literally *inverted* in a way that manages to superimpose pre-modern mythology upon American mythopoeia so as configure a typical American romance that is in fact an *anti*-romance that transforms America's alleged land of plenty into a Waste Land with no hopes of restoration.

The last instance that will be examined in this study of the explicitly degenerative reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth that characterizes American literature in the decade of 1920—and which exerts an extraordinary influence in the literature of the following decades—is Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). The novel features a cast of characters who are all sick, drifting as they travel from one Waste Land to the next, with no hope of restitution. Jake Barnes, the main character, is a fisher-king figure who, knowing that he cannot ever be healed, flees the Waste Land. He reaches out for varied, unattainable sources of fleeting, futile comfort, only to find out that there is no place left, no matter how remote or primitive, where ancient ritual can still restore life to a Waste Land that is no longer circumscribed to a place, but has become a generalized, desolate spiritual condition from which there is no outside.

Such is the starting point of the fourth and final part of this dissertation, which traces the process of mythical literalization, so to speak, that follows the 'wasteland novels' of the 1920s in the American literary tradition. The last part explores the process of representation and reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth in American 'after-modernism' and focuses on studying a circumstance of 'mythical multivalence' in the texts that inextricably connects with the aesthetic and semiotic principles of literary postmodernism. This mythical multivalence primarily flouts the themes and the structure of the myth that sets in order—and gives meaning to—the mythemes that shape the narrative, and thus is mainly made manifest in a sort of mythical fusion between the Grail Knight and the Fisher King that is thus configured as the explicit representation of the impossibility of regeneration that has come to define the Waste Land myth in the post-medieval literary tradition. Two mythical characters—the sick and the saviour, that is, the sick and well—become one, usually through a process of contagion, and progressively, unstoppably, mythical meanings begin to converge. Knight and King, who should stand at opposite sites of the mythical paradigm, begin to coalesce in one single signifier, the signifieds of which multiply, become mutable and interchangeable. This is a new development in the history of the representation of the Waste Land myth in the Anglo-American literary tradition, and in fact closes the transhistorical analysis carried out through this dissertation, which has explored the degenerative reinterpretation of the pre-modern myth in British and American literature, from the post-medieval to the postmodern.

The first chapter of this fourth part (eleventh chapter overall) explores John Steinbeck's 'wasteland novel' *To a God Unknown* (1933), which in fact inherits and

develops the already well-established mythical method of post-war modernism. What makes Steinbeck's short novel so different from the texts explored in the previous part of this study, and in fact explains why it was selected to open the fourth part of the dissertation, is the fact that it presents a rather clear process of mythical ambivalence, by means of which the main character can be simultaneously interpreted as incarnating two opposing mythical figures: the Grail Knight and the Fisher King. Steinbeck's novel actually presents a scenario of apparent regeneration, as other texts previously examined, yet the ideological ramifications of the communitarian rebirth depicted in the novel are brand new inasmuch as they present a revolutionary representation of the Waste Land myth itself. For the first time in the tradition explored in this study, the Grail is represented as a talisman of death, a circumstance that is a fundamental trait of the after-modernist, still-subversive representation of the Waste Land myth in American literature.

The second chapter of this part analyzes Djuna Barnes's late-modernist novel *Nightwood* (1937), which explores the mythical representation of a 'universal malady,' the main symptom of which is barren sexuality, and which is depicted as an infectious disease. Once again, the study of the novel examines a process of mythical ambivalence of characters who have erased the barriers that separated the sick and well in the plane of mythical representation, depicting Fisher-King figures who also have the role of healers, and Grail Knights who either are or grow as sick as the King they are meant to restore to health. *Nightwood* actually represents the climactic moment of the pre-modern Waste Land myth, that is, the moment when the Grail Knight ask the right question, the answer of which should have relieved the King and restore the blighted land. But as it will be detailed, Barnes's novel reinterprets that mythical climax as a moment of contagion that far from restoring the Waste Land condemns all who live in it.

The next chapter, chapter thirteen of this dissertation, advances a myth-critical reading of Bernard Malamud's 1952 novel *The Natural*, which is particularly interesting for two reasons. The first one is that Malamud's novel represents the American reality of the 1950s as a mythical Waste Land, which exposes the current idealization of the fifties as a mythologizing process that happened decades later and that can in fact thus be exposed as a rhetorical strategy to legitimize a conservative ideological agenda. The second reason, which will be detailed in the chapter, is the extraordinary complexity of the process of mythical representation that operates in the novel, which imbricates traditional western mythical patterns—such as the Waste Land myth—and the

mythologized narratives of baseball, which conflate in the text and in fact magnify the process of mythical multivalence that functions as the common trait linking together all the after-modernist texts explored in this part of the research. In the case of *The Natural*, mythical multivalence as a trait of mythical representation *after* modernism is consolidated, and the literalization of the myth in how it is presented in the text begins to take form; both characteristics pave the way for the typically postmodernist mythical representation and reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth that will be explored in the final two chapters of this dissertation.

Chapter fourteen analyzes Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962), which has been traditionally considered as a more or less overt reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth. What is remarkable about this novel, from a myth-critical standpoint, besides the progressively more and more *literal* representation of the myth, is that both main characters incarnate simultaneously the mythical figures of Grail Knight and Fisher King, which thus solidifies the multivalent representation of the myth and, consequently, the representation of a myth the meaning of which is ambivalent, signifying simultaneously one thing and the opposite. This flouting of the expected-as-necessary relationship between textual signified and mythical signifier, when added to the arguable literalization of the representation of the myth, brings about a process of reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth which is lastly explored from the critical perspective of post-modernity, circumscribed of course to the literary postmodernism in the American tradition.

Such critical perspective also dominates the analysis of the two novels that close this study, that is, Thomas Pynchon's *V.* (1963), and *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), which are examined in the last chapter of this study. This chapter reassesses the modernist notion of 'mythical method' by relating its principles with the motif and functionality of paranoia and conspiracy theory in Pynchon's novels, to formulate the concept of 're-mythologization'. This concept is a key notion for the myth-critical exploration of literary postmodernism as examined in this study, as it serves to explain how Pynchon's novel reutilizes the governing metaphors of the 'wasteland novels' and reinterprets the Grail as a talisman of death to recreate the mythical quest as a willing and self-aware journey toward the annihilation of all forms of life. This chapter thus explores the reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth as a myth of annihilation, and examines how the process of literary symbolization that arguably transformed a life rite into a myth, and then symbolized that myth as a recurrent literary motif, is reversed in

Pynchon's postmodernist texts. Myth reverts to ritual in how it is represented in literature, *literally*. The signifiers that represent the myth in the literary text have come to articulate actual fertility rituals, which in fact bring about new life. But the new life is lifeless, for that is the only end that may result from the progressively more and more degenerative reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth in post-medieval Anglo-American literature: a new life that is not simply disconnected from social (dis)order, or swollen with death, or sick with no remedy. The life that has been restored to the Waste Land recreated in the literature of American postmodernism, which as it will be detailed along this study, inherits the tradition of degenerative, eventually apocalyptic representation and reinterpretation of the Arthurian myth in British and American literature, is an utterly, overwhelmingly lifeless life: artificial, prosthetic, and perpetually inanimate.

PART I
THE FISHER KING

REPRESENTATION AND REINTERPRETATION OF THE WASTE LAND MYTH IN EARLY-MODERN POLITICAL DRAMA

CHAPTER 1

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE'S *EDWARD II*: TRAGEDY, HISTORY AND THE REMNANTS OF ROMANCE MYTHOLOGY

HISTORY, TRAGEDY, ROMANCE

Traditionally considered as the play through which "the Elizabethan history play attains maturity and some degree of aesthetic greatness" (Ribner 244), Christopher's Marlowe *Edward II* (ca. 1592) purposefully condenses thirty years of a highly varied and vastly conflictive period in English history into one single year of dramatic action (Ribner 245), transforming the episodic account in the Chronicles of King Edward II's reign into what Ribner defined as "a well integrated tragedy" (345). Much, in fact, has been written on the tragic nature of the play; as Ribner notes already in the 1950s, "critics have generally recognized [the play's] superiority as a work of art to any of the history plays which proceeded it, but they have tended to consider it apart from the main stream of historical drama" (244). Indeed, Harry Levin argued in his now classic study of Marlowe's drama, *The Overrreacher*, that in composing *Edward II*, Marlowe "[was] not concerned with the state but, as always, with the individual; and in this case, it is a poignant irony that the individual happens to be the head of a state" (110). Other critics, however, have noted over the decades that even if the play presents "a conscious and deliberate moulding of chronicle matter into the shape of tragedy (…) the identity of a history play is no way destroyed" (Ribner 244). Far from narrow-mindedly subscribing

one argument and rejecting the opposite, this chapter will draw a synthesis of both classic perspectives so as to explore the process of mythical subversion enacted in Marlowe's play. Such mythical subversion, as it will be examined, begins to consolidate a dramatic process of deconsecrating kingship that articulates, in dramatic form, the political anxieties of Renaissance England along the last decade of the sixteenth-century and the beginning of the seventeenth.

Quite straightforwardly, *Edward II* may be defined as a play about the consequences of "neglecting one's duty to realize one's individuality" (Levin 115). The aim of this study is to reassess such political subject matter through the advancing of a myth-critical reading that will examine the dramatic interplay of conflicting traditions and discourses on kingship. Such interplay brings about a rather subversive codification of the rhetoric of violence, history, royal authority and political responsibility in Elizabethan England, since as editor Charles R. Forker notes, "Marlowe capitalizes brilliantly on the dramatic ironies created by the huge gap between the inherent majesty of the crown and the feeble incapacity of its wearer" in a way that relates the intensity of suffering in the play not only with the human flaws of the main character, but also with "the nature of the monarchical role" (Forker 91). The result is the dramatization of "the poignancy of royal desecration" (91), which is enacted through the representation and subversive reinterpretation of the mythical structures inherent to historical writing in Tudor England.

Traditionally, critics such as Tillyard have considered that in his dramatic portrayal of King Edward II, "Marlowe shows no sense of national responsibility: he merely attaches two current political orthodoxies[1] to a play concerned nominally but not essentially with historical matter" (115).[2] Nonetheless Ribner argues that, despite the fact that *Edward II* can be regarded as "a mature tragedy of character in which a potentially good man comes to destruction because of inherent weaknesses which make him incapable of coping with a crisis which he himself has helped to create" (244), it is no less true that, even if interpreting the figure of King Edward II as a tragic hero, "the sins of the hero are sins of government; the crisis he faces is a political one, and his

[1] Tillyard here refers to the doctrines of loyalty and kingship which, in his view, find no defiance in Marlowe's play, since the text "never confuses the legitimate cutting off of princely parasites with the illegitimate lifting of the hands against the Lord's Annointed" (114).

[2] On his lengthy and in-depth introduction to the play, Forker comments extensively on the tragedy vs. history controversy, explaining that, "following Tylliard, most commentators in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s emphasized the private as opposed to the public side of the play" (86). The list of critics mentioned by Forker includes Leech (1960), Steane (1965), Sanders (1968), Wickham, Clemen, and Bradbrook (Forker 86-87, 130 note 118).

disaster is also ruin to his kingdom in the form of civil war" (Ribner 245). Yet through his claim that *Edward II* should then be taken into account as a Tudor history play,[3] Ribner eloquently (and perhaps contradictorily) identifies the figure of King Edward II with an almost archetypal classic hero: "like the traditional tragic hero," he writes, Edward "is a king, and his downfall is thus intimately involved with the life of the state" (244). The question thus remains of how Edward II can be both a historical figure and an archetypal tragic hero. The answer lies in the intersection of myth and historiography that defines the early-modern history play.

In the English vernacular tradition, the genre of tragedy is best understood through an interpretation of Chaucer's *The Monk's Tale*, as it constitutes the first English *de casibu*s and, more importantly, advances an understanding of tragedy as a genre that exceeds the rather restrictive notion of 'fortune tragedy'.[4] As Bruda notes (44-47), by including tragedies in which Fortune plays no part, along with tragedies that present a cause-effect relationship between evil actions and personal destruction, and some others that recount the death of good men and offer no moral at all, Chaucer defines tragedy simply by its storyline: "Tragedie is to seyn a certeyn storie, / As olde bookes maken memorie, / Of hym that stood in greet prosperitee, / And is yfallen ou of heigh deree / Into myserie, and endeth wrechedly" (Chaucer VII 1973-1977). English tragedy then incudes, but it is not limited to, *de casibus*; moreover, Chaucer introduces a second insight into the genre: the hypothesis that the matter of tragedy will be cause to sorrow for the audience, who will empathize with the calamities of the protagonist. Two features then characterize English tragedy: a fall-from-grace narrative pattern, and the evocation of sympathy in the audience. Easily, both defining traits are traceable in *Edward II*, which allows for the identification of King Edward with a traditional, archetypal tragic hero; a literary trope rather than a plausible recreation of a historical figure.

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[3] Ribner argument for this claim is that *Edward II* digs out from the Chronicles an earlier political situation of interest to the Elizabethans, because the events of the play in fact mirror the possibility of a civil war which the Elizabethan audience feared might happen again, if Elizabeth I disregarded the political lessons implicit in the monarchies of the past (Ribner 244-245).

[4] "In general (there is no consistent scholarly practice), literary critics use the term *de casibus* to denote tragedies of fortune—that is, tragedies in which the protagonists fall through no clear fault of their own. Often, however, '*de casibus* tragedy' seems to be the shorthand that Renaissance drama critics use for 'plodding medieval tragedy'" (Budra 39). Whatever the case, the category *de casibus* tragedy derives from Bocaccio's *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium* (*On the Fates of Famous Men*) (1355-1360), a highly influential work of fifty-six biographies composed, in Latin, in the form of moral stories of the falls of famous people.

As Joan Parks has cleverly noticed, the dramatic representation of medieval history in Marlowe's play—insofar as it is enacted in the form of a tragedy—is a fictive artefact that she identifies with "the self-centred and nonhistorical perspective of the tragic king" (288). The 'tragic king' is, in this argument, a non-historical, timeless figure that can be explored through the prism of myth-criticism, as such an argument is also cognate with the notion of Tudor History that is operative in Marlowe's play. In mythic thought, all time is presupposed to be ineluctably cyclical,[5] in a similar way as, in Bruda's terms, "in a cyclical model of history, all events are perceived as archetypal" (15). For Tudor Historians, History occurred in the form of recurrent historical patterns in a way that made it possible to learn from events in the past and apply such knowledge to contemporary politics. Yet this seemingly medieval[6] remnant functioned exclusively from a purely theoretical perspective. Budra explains:

> History was viewed as repetitive, or cyclical, and therefore major patterns of events could be counted on to recur (…) But, for most people, the notion of cyclical time would have occurred only in the contemplation of natural, liturgical, and *metaphorical patterns* of recurrence, none of which would have superseded the orthodox Christian perception of history as a finite progression of events from the Creation to the Apocalypse. Time, for the Christian, is linear and progressive; a gradual revelation of God's purpose in specific events. (14, my italics)

Summarizing Bruda's argument, historical events might be interpreted as archetypal within a cyclical understanding of History but, in Renaissance England, History is considered cyclical only insofar as its repetitive patterns are regarded *metaphorically*.[7] That is to say, History is not so much believed to be truly repetitive and cyclical—for the time of Christianity cannot be but linear and continuous—as it is *represented*, that is, *written* as repetitive and cyclical. The pursued effect is, of course, the (once again) metaphorical transformation of historical matter into a mirror on which

[5] See, e.g., Mircea Eliade's theory of myth, eloquently condensed as follows: "Everything begins over again at its commencement every instant. The past is but a prefiguration of the future. No event is irreversible and no transformation is final. In a certain sense, it is even possible to say that nothing new happens in the world, for everything is but the repetition of the same primordial archetypes; this repetition, by actualizing the mythical moment when the archetypal gesture was revealed, constantly maintains the world in the same auroral instant of the beginnings. Time but makes possible the appearance and existence of things. It has no final influence upon their existence, since it is in itself constantly regenerated" (89-90).

[6] As Peter Burke noticed, "medieval men lacked a sense of the past being different in quality from the present" (1), and medieval history lacked "an interest in causation" (13).

[7] Kamps explains that the concept of repetition in History was indeed necessary insofar as medieval Christian thought "preached that each human being's life is a kind of universal morality drama with the fate of the human soil as its focal point" (12).

Tudor England could see itself *represented*, whether for exemplary, propagandistic or patriotic purposes. The result is the contemporary, timeless recreation (in Tudor historiography, first, and much more evidently in Elizabethan political drama later) of historical events that, inasmuch as they are construed through the representation of historical time as recurrent and circular, become a sort of *mythical* narrative that repeats a set of archetypes in a series of constantly present mythical moments.[8] And yet, the recurrence of mythical moments in historical drama constitutes an intrinsically pessimistic representation of eternal recurrence, for as Kamps explains, the coalescence of Christian linear time and a recurrent understanding of History resulted a new shape of time, "that of a spiral, endlessly repeating the drama of rise and fall, of sin, repentance, and mercy and punishment, and ever coming nearer the apocalypse" (12).[9] Indeed, the idea that mythical recurrence might in fact represent a process of ineluctable degeneration is a key argument of this study, and certainly a crucial notion for the understanding of how mythical subversion operates in *Edward II* to challenge the ideological notion found in romance that the restoration of political order in a particular society will ever bring about, in tandem, natural and spiritual regeneration for its people.

As it has been argued, History only becomes cyclical—and hence, mythical—once it operates as a metaphor; that is, once it becomes a *representation* of past events. Following Hayden White's celebrated argument about historical narratives, historical events, in order to be explanatory, need to be transformed into *stories* through a process of "emplotment"; that is, through the "the encodation of the facts contained in the chronicle as components of specific kinds of plot structures" (83). These plot structures are "culturally provided categories" that therefore reshape historical events into "metaphorical statements which suggest a relation of similitude between such events and processes and the story types we conventionally use to endow the events of our lives with culturally sanctioned meanings" (88). In the case of Tudor historiography the "icon of the structure" (88) that articulates the events of medieval English history is the culturally-provided category of romance, which determines that the historical narrative enacted in *Edward II* is structurally mythical, and thus echoes with the mythical

[8] See note 5 in this chapter.

[9] Goy-Blanquet relates this idea to the Greek notion of eternal recurrence, which "left no hope for the future: the universe ran through endless repetitive cycles, deteriorating with each new cycle as it moves further away from its initial perfection" (58). And as she notes, the collision of pagan and Christian conceptions of time "climbed to uneasy heights just as Shakespeare's histories reached the stage, when the approaching 'millennium' revived the old myths of decline with fresh apocalyptic fears" (59).

remnants of a literary past that permits the identification of King Edward II with an archetypal Maimed-King figure. He is, as mentioned, a tragic hero, a literary trope; and as the mythical Maimed-King of Arthurian legend, like Oedipus Rex in classical tragedy, the archetypically weak king in Marlowe's play is mystically deemed unfit to govern his kingdom, and made responsible (but, perhaps, guiltless) for the plight that plagues his realm.

THE PLAYER KING

From his ascension to power in 1307, Edward II governed a country in perpetual war against Scotland, Ireland and France (Forker 46); in Marlowe's play, such tumultuous foreign affairs are most notably and best summarized in Lancaster's accusatory speech in Act II. He warns the King, threatening with revolt:

> Look for rebellion, look to be deposed.
> Thy garrisons are beaten out of France,
> And, lame and poor, lie groaning at the gates.
> The wild O'Neill, with swarms of Irish kerns,
> Lives uncontrolled within the English pale;
> Unto the walls of York the Scots made road,
> And unresisted drave away rich spoils. (II.II. 161-166)

As Forker notes in his footnote to these lines, the disasters listed by Lancaster are "too unspecific and unchronological to be based on any single passage or group of passages in Holinshed" (198).[10] Thus, rather than a condensed account of the various catastrophic foreign conflicts that England was immersed in at the time, and of the king's nefarious role in such calamities, Lancaster's speech stands in for a personal

[10] However, Forker also explains, following Charlton-Waller, that there is a passage in the Chronicles describing how in 1322 the Scots and the French took military advantage of England's weakened position after the eruption of civil war when the barons revolted against the King (198). Far from demonstrating the effectiveness of the barons' revolt as a solution against the frail position of England in the conflict against its foreign enemies, the reference to the Chronicles demonstrates that such argument is a purely rhetorical device employed by the rebels in the play to justify their violent actions as, in effect, the civil war evidently only aggravated the delicate position of England in its foreign wars: "Here is to be noted, that during the time whilest the ciuill warre was in hand betwixt king Edward and his barons, the Scots and Frenchmen were not idle, for the Scots wasted & destroied th countrie of the bishoprike of Durham… & the Frenchmen made roades & incursions into the borders of Guien (…) for so much as they vnderstood the discord betwitx him and his barons, and how infortunatlie he had sped against the Scots, by reason whereof they iudged the time to serue most fitlie now for their purpose" (Holinshed, in Forker 334).

accusation against the King, the meaning of which is primarily metaphorical, as the unfavourable reports of war are immediately followed (and paralleled) by a litany of England's domestic issues, both at court and in the streets:

> *Mortimer Junior*. Thy court is naked, being bereft of those
> That makes a king seem glorious to the world—
> I mean the peers whom thou shouldst dearly love;
> Libels are cast against thee in the street,
> Ballads and rhymes made of thy overthrow.
> *Lancaster*. The northern borderers, seeing their houses burnt,
> Their wives and children slain, run up and down
> Cursing the name of thee and Gaveston. (II.II. 173-180)

Conspicuously, only two of the famous battles of the English against the Scots are included in the play: Bannockburn and Boroughbridge (Forker 46). In the quoted lines above, the reference is Bannockburn, a disaster for which, judging by the barons' accusations, both Edward and his minion Gaveston are to blame, since the northern borderers are cursing their names after the tragic defeat of the English garrisons. Not only then the king but also his favourite—that is, the dramatic emblem of the King's most personal desires—are made personally responsible for the misfortunes that afflict the kingdom, and thus, the notions of foreign and domestic—and by extension, of public and private—become inextricable in the play's re-examination of history. The disastrous battle of Bannockburn, after all—fought in actuality in 1314, after the death of Gaveston—is referenced *directly* in the play only in allusion to the king's inadequacy and (effeminate) imposture. Mortimer accuses:

> When wert thou in the field with banner spread?
> But once! And thy soldiers marched like players,
> With garish robes, not armour, and thyself,
> Bedaubed with gold, rode laughing at the rest,
> Nodding and shaking of thy spangled crest,
> Where women's favours hung like labels down. (II.II. 181-186)

Once again in Mortimer's words, the public and the private, the foreign and the domestic become indistinguishable: not only because of his negligence and disinterest, but also because of his ineptitude and *effeminacy* is the king made personally responsible for the failure of his armies in battle against the enemies of England. As it transpires from Mortimer's denunciation, the king, bedaubed in golden robes, shaking

his crest with ladies' favours hanging down, leads an army of *mock* soldiers into the slaughter. In Mortimer's caricature, the king resembles a gallant knight in a romance or a song, fighting in an ideal *representation* of war. Or rather, King Edward is here depicted as a fictitious king governing over the unreal, mythological court described by Gaveston in his soliloquy at the beginning of the play:

> Therefore I'll have Italian masques by night,
> Sweet speeches, comedies, and pleasing shows;
> And in the day, when he shall walk abroad,
> Like sylvan nymphs my pages shall be clad,
> My men, like satyrs grazing on the lawns,
> Shall with their goat-feet dance an antic hay.
> Sometimes a lovely boy in Dian's shape,
> With hair that gilds the water as it glides,
> Crownets of pearl about his naked arms,
> And in his sportful hands an olive tree
> To hide those parts which men delight to see,
> Shall bathe him in a spring; and there, hard by,
> One like Actaeon, peeping through the grove,
> Shall by the angry goddess be transformed,
> And, running in the likeness of an hart,
> By yelping hounds pulled down, and seem to die. (I.I. 54-69)

In Gaveston's imaginary court, which he intends to create for the King, pages and "lovely" boys and men will be dressed like "sylvan nymphs" and "satyrs" and other mythological figures; in the same way that soldiers, at war, do in fact dress up like players. To please the king, Gaveston knows that the court must be transformed into a stage in which men and pages will play the parts of Diana and Actaeon; that is to say, to please the king, the court needs to become the space of a mythological fiction. But, more terribly, so does war. For as Roger Sales brilliantly argued, King Edward II, in Marlowe's play, is in fact a "player king" (130). He "counterfeits kingly virtues for a time and yet is unable to sustain the performance" (123); "his performance is essentially much ado about nothing" (129). Edward's reigning is a vain dramatic representation. The king is only concerned with the fulfilment of his desires and the realization of his individuality; but this circumstance not only results in his negligence towards his political duties, but also transforms Edward's royal responsibilities into a mere performance. For as an individual, the king possesses a hyper-aesthetic personality that makes him unable to live without the visual pleasures of Italian masques, sweet speeches, comedies, pleasing shows, antic hay dances, etc.; as Sales argues, such is

precisely the reason why Mortimer forces him to act out a deposition scene in the moment when he is overthrown (Sales 130). All tasks and stages of kingship—including, of course, leadership in war—are therefore a performance for Edward. He and his soldiers dress up like players to go into battle and like a knight in a jousting tournament, Edward flourishes the ladies' favours hanging from his crest, to all extends *performing* as he goes to war. The result is calamitous for the people; for the barons, it justifies their revolt against the legitimate but incapable king. After all, insofar as his royal persona is only a role that he performs, Edward is no true king.

As already mentioned, Mortimer's accusation about the King's ridicule in Bannockburn explicitly recalls Gaveston's speech in Act I, which is, according to Forker, "an imaginative construct based upon Holinshed's description of Edward's 'disordered manners'" (144); moreover, Mortimer's report of the battle of Bannockburn also connotes the King's effeminate manners. Both circumstances indisputably connect the martial failure of Edward's kingdom with the king's sexual involvement with Gaveston; hence, by metaphorical extension, one can textually sustain the argument that sodomy "at once describes the sexual act and presents a metaphor that indicates subversion" (Rutkoski 283). For sodomy arguably stands in as a metaphorical construct that signifies political disorder,[11] and as such it constitutes one of the two nodal points, along with the nation-state, that sustain the network of conflicting power discourses in Marlowe's *Edward II* (Bianco par. 8). The interplay upon these two dominating discourses evidently converges in the figure of Gaveston, and all the play's antinomies conflate in the non-normative—in terms of class, nationality and sexuality—relationship between the King and his favourite. Gaveston, as literal lover and metaphorical national ruin, embodies then within his dramatis persona the dialectics of the public and private, and of the temporal and eternal natures that make up the king's two bodies (Bianco par. 8); that is, the 'providential' theory of kingship that was dominant in Renaissance England.[12]

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[11] Crewe eloquently notes, following Alan Bray's influential *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (1982), that the term sodomy, which could refer to, among others, heterosexual adultery, "designated a perceived threat to sexual, *hence political*, order rather than same-sex relations exclusively" (388, my italics).

[12] For clarity purposes, the 'providential' theory of kingship may be defined as "the concept of the monarch ruling as the chosen vice-regent of God, independent of the consent of the commons, unfettered by ecclesiastical authority, outside of and prior of to he laws of the kingdom—all summed up in the term, 'divine right'" (Carroll 127). Insofar as this ideology presupposes the divine nature of the king, straightforwardly mythical representations of kingship in political drama may be argued to validate the providential theory of kingship. However, as it will be explored in the first part of this study, dramatic

THE SICK BODY OF THE KING

Tudor political theory established that a 'body politic' (the king's institutional function as ruler) and a 'body natural' (his private self) inhered in the mystical body of a king, which possessed, in consequence, a two-fold identity in perpetual tension between the material and the immaterial, the personal and the public, the earthly and the divine.[13] In the case of King Edward II in Marlowe's play, however, his task as ruler has been established as merely a pantomime. His institutional function, his 'body politic', is only a part he plays in front of his audience of flatterers. As he admits himself, "My nobles rule, I bear the name of king / I wear the crown but am controlled by them" (Marlowe V.I. 28-9). He is, to all extents, a powerless king: his body politic has been overpowered by the desires and frustrations of his body natural, and this profound imbalance in the two-fold mystical identity of the king is represented, rhetorically, through a discursive interplay in which the counter-discourse of sodomy overcomes and ultimately dismantles the dominant discourse of the nation-state and the monarch's political responsibility. The main two (conflicting) discursive nodes in the play—sodomy and the nation-state—draw together a reflection upon the simultaneously private (that is, natural, individual) and public (that is, political) nature of the King respectively. Sodomy absorbs, metaphorically, the king's political insufficiency; as sodomy, beyond the many, and widely complex repercussions in terms of the play's sexual politics, can be interpreted contextually as a discursive construct that represented at the time, rhetorically, a situation of political unrest, disorder and subversion.[14] Subsequently, insofar as the body natural of the King is represented through the discourse on sodomy—which stands in as the discursive construct to signify political and social chaos—it follows logically the inference that the king's natural body is, to all extents, made responsible for the political chaos displayed upon the stage. As Thurn argues,

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representations of kingship in early modern drama recreate myth rather subversively in a manner that unavoidably challenges and contests this dominant ideology.

[13] The medieval and early-modern political concept of the king's two bodies might be most clearly inferred from the writings of sixteenth-century jurist Edmund Plowden: "to [the King's] natural Body is conjoined his Body politic, which contains his royal Estate and Dignity; and the Body politic includes the Body natural, but the Body natural is the lesser (...) and he has not a Body natural distinct and divided by itself from the Office and Dignity royal, but a Body natural and a Body politic together indivisible; and these two Bodies are incorporated in one Person, and make one Body" (qt. in Kantorowicz 9).

[14] Stephen Orgel argues that "translating the whole range of power politics into sodomy (…) was probably safer (…) than it would have been to lay it, so to speak, straight" (425). In his view, *Edward II* is then the only Renaissance play in which homoeroticism is truly and explicitly presented "in the terms in which the culture formally conceived it—as antisocial, seditious, [and] ultimately disastrous" (Orgel 423).

"disorders of desire are revealed to be the shadow of political disorder (…) [since] Edward's scenes of embrace represent precisely the abdication of power [and] the loss of mastery" (Thurn 117).

Edward as an individual, then, should take responsibility for the chaos and destruction that blight his realm. Yet, the matter of responsibility is highly complex in the play, as the rhetoric of *irresponsibility*—precisely through a process of mythical representation—is inextricable from the network of conflicting discourses that pervade the dramatic action. Inasmuch as the natural body of the king is made responsible for the political chaos and social unrest that afflicts England, the faults of the king are codified as the most evident faults of a body natural that is inherently frail and mortal; that is to say, the king's faults are codified and metaphorically characterized in terms of sickness, which would allegedly exempt him from any responsibility. For the king is accused of being "wicked" (I.II. 4) and "betwitched" (I.II. 55), but most of all, the king is considered by the barons to be "brainsick" (I.I. 124) and "lovesick" (I.IV. 87). His obsessive infatuation with Gaveston and his consequent negligence towards his duties are regarded and expressed by the barons as a kind of sickness that, as in the case of the mythical Maimed King, is unavoidably transferred to the land. Mortimer laments, after he is taken prisoner in the course of Edward's only (and fleeting) victory: "England, unkind to thy nobility, / Groan for this grief; behold how *you are maimed*" (III.II. 66-67, my italics). The barons, after all, allegedly revolt to restore the land, literally "to *mend* the king and do our country good" (I.IV. 257). Even the Earl of Kent, the king's brother, decides to join the rebels' cause out "of love to this our native land" (II.III. 1) and in "the realm's behoof" (II.III. 3).

The king is sick and, as in the medieval myth of the Waste Land, the land is plagued as a consequence. The rebels, declaring war on the king, are attempting to *mend* him and do the country good, like the Arthurian knights who march heroically to restore the Maimed King to health and the land to its (physical and spiritual) fertility. But of course, the analogy does not hold. However chivalric the barons' purpose may be, and even if Mortimer believes that the murder of Gaveston should earn him praise and glory, "for purging of the realm of such a plague" (I.IV. 270), their heroic intention of healing the king and restoring the land is synchronized with extremely violent outbursts, such as Lancaster's threat to the king: "…either change your mind, / Or look to see the throne where you should sit / To float in blood, and at thy wanton head / The glozing head of thy based minion thrown" (I.I. 129-132). Inevitably, such gruesome language

destabilizes the rhetoric of the commonwealth exercised by the barons to legitimize their rebellion, and also exposes the latent violence that will erupt at the end of the play, thwarting the audience's expectations about a rightful, ordered deposition of an unlawful king that might be rooted in proto-constitutional justifications.[15] Thus the barons' seemingly self-mythologizing rhetoric is transitory, contradictory, and ultimately nothing but a feeble legitimizing strategy to justify their "unnatural revolt" (IV. VI. 9).

As Mortimer himself admits, "Tis treason to be up against the King" (I.IV. 281), even if the romance-reminiscent rhetoric of sick kings and plagued lands seems to discursively legitimize the need to overthrow a legitimate king that has grown unfit for government. In truth, however, the mythical echoes of the barons' revolt, besides exonerating the King from any blame in his faults of government, only serve for the rebels to also avoid taking full responsibility for initiating a civil war that, in effect, only aggravates the plight that afflicts England. Because the rebels cannot "mend the king." Within the mythical rhetoric of the barons, King Edward is indeed sick and needs to be healed, but, as in the late fifteen-century vernacular tradition of Arthurian mythology, the Maimed King can no longer be restored to health so that his land can be prosper again. On the contrary, the king must be allowed to die so that his young successor, in an act of displaced healing, can take his place as legitimate heir.

As it was explained in the introduction,[16] by the time the myth of the Waste Land is recreated in late fifteen-century England, the earliest, twelfth-century version found in Chretien de Troyes's *Perceval* is no longer a somewhat fixed tale about a king wounded in battle who governs over a land laid waste. On the contrary, the figure of the Maimed King and his inextricable connection to a wasted kingdom have become a repetitive motif in the romance tradition that recurs here and there in Malory's comprehensive account of the Arthurian cycle, as an unquestionable leitmotif that expresses a medieval *mystical* conception of kingship. The king is believed to be inextricably and sympathetically connected to the land, so that if the king dies unjustly or is maimed, the

[15] What Knowles defines in general terms as "resistance theory" (64) and Carroll, more specifically, as "contractual theory" (133) may be understood a set of varied reasons for deposition that already in the sixteenth century, in England and in the continent, "argued the limited nature of kingship and promoted the right of resistance to tyranny, even justifying the overthrow of rightfully enthroned kings if necessary" (Carroll 133). Most famously, in his *A Short Treatise of Political Power* of 1556, John Ponet wrote: "Commonwealths and realms may live, when the head is cut off, and may put on a new head, that is, make them a new governor, when they see their old head seek too much his own will and not the wealth of the whole body, for the which he was only ordained" (qt. in Carroll 125).

[16] See p. 14.

land will be laid waste as the result of a curse, a plague, or a war. The rhetoric of romance that articulates that belief in the form of myth echoes, as seen, in the barons' characterization of the king's inadequacy in terms of a sickness to be purged, in Marlowe's fictive recreation of early fourteen-century England: the King is brainsick and lovesick, and so the land is plagued. Civil War—the end of which can be no other than the execution of the rightful but unfit King—is codified as the barons' intended-as-heroic task, which should—but does not—result in the restoration of the Waste Land.

In Malory's fifteenth-century retelling of the Waste Land myth, which includes three different Maimed Kings and three resulting Waste Lands, only the last Maimed King, King Pelles, is wounded in the thighs. Neither King Pellas nor King Labor are explicitly depicted as suffering from a sexual wound but, as explained in the introduction, such affliction is the ailing characteristic that originally incapacitated the Maimed King, for in origin the Waste Land myth, as it is has been recurrently argued by Arthurian scholars, reproduces "the ancient, heathen theme of the sterilization of the king and the consequent desolation of his realm" (Loomis 248). It is highly significant, then, that in Marlowe's reutilization of the myth, King Edward's wound is in fact denoted as sexual, since the faults of his body natural are articulated through the subversive discourse of sodomy. He certainly is a "lovesick" king.

THE MAIMED KING MUST DIE

Edward's carelessness and disinterest are, as mentioned, connoted in the barons' accusations as a disease; this fact imbues the king with the mythological halo of a quasi-medieval Maimed King, and consequently exempts him from any responsibility beyond his passive resignation in the failure of his body politic's mystic forces, which in the case of Edward fail to "reduce, or even remove, the imperfections of [his] fragile human nature" (Kantorowicz 9). Since the King is accused of being sick, his body natural is not only predominant over his body politic; it is also unwell, and thus the influence that the king's private being has over his public duty is of a corrupting nature. In revolting against the lawful but unfit king, the barons are "purging of the realm of (…) a plague" (I.IV. 270). The king's malady is the cause for the plight that afflicts England, in both

mythical and political terms; it is, after all, because of the king's obsessive infatuation with Gaveston that he dismisses his responsibility to the nation-state.

The king threats: "Ere my sweet Gaveston shall part from me, / This isle shall fleet upon the ocean" (I.IV. 47-8). He ignores the barons' protests: "Make several kingdoms of this monarchy, / And share it equally amongst you all, / So I may have some nook or corner left / To frolic with my dearest Gaveston" (I.IV. 70-3). Evidently, the execution of his royal prerogative is exercised solely through his desire to be with Gaveston, eloquently demonstrating how sodomy—as a discursive construct to signify political disorder and thus on the basis that non-normative sexuality can be interpreted as a broad metaphor to signify social chaos—constitutes the fault of the king's natural body, which is unwell and afflicted by a weakness that cannot be reduced by the mystic forces that should be in possession of his body politic. As in the myth, it is then a form of sexual inadequacy—or rather, a disruption of normative, generative sexuality—that is enacted as the cause to the (both literal and metaphorical) wasting of King Edward's England, which is impoverished, neglected, and simultaneously desolated by foreign and domestic wars, as the king dismisses his duties to frolic with his minion.

Edward II is not impotent or castrated, like the medieval Fisher King, but the social syntax that derives from the imitation of natural order,[17] that is, from the assumed as natural, generative sexuality of men, is invalidated by the king's sexual conduct, as it disrupts the 'natural' order that defines male subjectivity in terms of reproductive sexual agency. Edward II'a power as a male individual can no longer be derived from his reproductive sexual capacity, which in mythical terms turns out to be a calamitous circumstance. But even politically, the king's renunciation of normative sexuality is indubitably a source of social unrest, as it results in the King's dismissal and alienation of his wife, Queen Isabella, who becomes a key player in the conspiracy against the monarch. Isabella complains to Mortimer, the chief conspirator:

> For my lord the king regards me not,
> But dotes upon the love of Gaveston.
> He claps his cheeks and hangs about his neck,
> Smiles in his face and whispers in his ears,
> And when I come, he fowns, as who should say,
> 'Go wither thou wilt, seeing I have Gaveston'. (I.II. 49-54)

[17] As it will be detailed in the following chapter, this is, in fact, the primarily function of mythology: the derivation of social axioms and structures from a metaphysical understanding of a harmonized natural world. See p. 56.

In pursuing his sexual relationship with his favourite, the King has abandoned the queen, and thus his "wanton humour" (I.IV. 199) is only channelled through barren—and politically subversive—sexuality. In purely ritualistic terms, in abandoning his wife to "frolic with his minion" (I.II. 67), the king "has ceased (…) to be able to reproduce his kind, [so] it is time for him to die and to make room for a more vigorous successor" (Frazer 313).[18] As Forker demonstrates, Marlowe in fact distorts historical events surrounding the figure of Queen Isabella to fabricate a "carefully constructed image of estrangement between the king and his spouse" (55), which exacerbates the play's connotations of sexual barrenness associated to the relationship between the king and Gaveston.[19] Edward II is not impotent or castrated, but the root of chaos and ruin for his kingdom is debatably sexual; it is not a castrating wound, but a socially-threatening form of non-normative sexuality that defines the king as sterile and, unquestionably and consequently in mythical terms, as responsible for the wasting of his land. The sympathetic connection between the King's reproductive capacity and the fertility of the land that is at the core of the Waste Land myth is transformed into a symbolic connection between the king's wilful sterility—or, in more literal terms, his wilful choice of alienating his wife in favour of pursuing an socially-subversive sexual relationship—and the ruin of a kingdom that is, in turn, neglected and spoiled. Forker explains:

> In *Edward II* Marlowe dramatizes the link between sexuality and self-destruction without ever descending to self-pity, special pleading, or conventional sexual moralizing. We simple feel that the spacious kingdom which Edward inherits, in which he is doomed and in which he dooms himself, contracts spiritually—indeed humanly—to the wretched dark cell that seems to have awaited him from the outset. Sexual love and the inevitably of destruction are shown finally to be inseparably coupled. (98)

As in the case of the Maimed King in fifteen-century vernacular Arthuriana, Marlowe's sick king must be killed, so that a strong and vigorous successor can inherit

[18] The relationship between the Waste Land myth and the ritualistic killing of the divine king as described in Frazer's classic anthropological study *The Golden Bough*, already summarized in the introduction, will be explained in depth in following chapters that deal with more overtly ritualistic reinterpretations of the Arthurian myth.

[19] Connotations of sexual sterility are also intensified in the play by the excision from the tale of all the king's children except for the Prince of Wales (Forker 49) who, in inheriting his father's throne and ascending to power as the legitimate successor in the final act, is present in the play primarily to complete a ritual function, as it will be explained further on.

the body politic, effectively restoring the land to prosperity. And so the barons plot to kill the king, expecting to be praised for their "brave attempt" (I.IV. 268) and hoping to have their names enrolled in the Chronicles. In an intersection of the dialectics of romance and historiography, Edward has become "England's scourge" (III.II 74), his incapable government a sort of plague; the historical wars against Scotland, Ireland and France merge together in the rebels' personal accusations against the King, and are thus codified rhetorically as a spread-out affliction that has been transferred from the "brainsick" Maimed King to the "plagued" Waste Land that he governs. As a consequence, the civil war that erupts from the barons' revolt is explicitly identified with a cure "to *mend* the king" (I.IV. 257) and, by extension, to "do our country good" (I.IV. 257); and so the violence onstage increases dramatically without any character taking responsibility for it, until, in the end, the final act of horrific violence is first presented, and ultimately subverted, as a sadistic—and arguably futile—sacrificial ritual.

As Alvin Kernan argued,

> History was discovered by Tudor historians to have the sameness of ritual: a weak or saintly king makes political mistakes and is overthrown by rebellious and arrogant subjects; the kingdom becomes a wasteland and society a chaos in which every man's hand is set against his fellows; after a period of great suffering, reaction against the forces of evil occurs, and a strong and good king restores order. (264)

Even if traditional Marlowe criticism has often argued that Marlowe detects no recurrent pattern in history,[20] the ritual structure described by Kernan corresponds, in fact, with the plot structure of *Edward II*, as can be clearly observed in the title of the 1594 printing: *The Troublesome Reign and Lamentable Death of Edward the Second, King of England: with the Tragicall Fall of Proud Mortimer*. In Marlowe's play, a weak, arguably *sick* king makes political mistakes, which result in England's successive defeats against its foreign enemies and in the suffering and impoverishment of the English people. In order to overthrow him, the barons rise up in arms and civil conflict erupts. Foreign and civil wars conflate, exacerbating the escalation of violence and the propagation of social chaos, until the ascension to power of the young, strong, legitimate heir, Edward III, who punishes the self-servicing usurpers and restores order

[20] See, e.g., Ribner and Sanders, and the latter's commentary on Ribner's claim on the issue (Sanders 396).

so that the land can be prosper again. Evidently, such ritualistic structure entails a cyclical process which is cognate with the structure of medieval romance and imbued with romance ideology, insofar as it presupposes an eternally recurrent regeneration. In all medieval accounts of the mythical tale the Maimed King's Waste Land is always restored when, after the king's death, the spirit of his body politic is transferred onto his more vigorous successor. In *Edward II*, England is also restored after the ascension of Edward III to the throne; or, at least, political order is restored in England at the end of the play. Yet, the climax of this ritual of succession that underlies the plot of Marlowe's play, even if it results in the restoration of political order, also raises inevitable questions with regards to the regenerative potency of violence that serve to undermine the ideology beneath the ritual (and hence, mythical) structure that sustains the dramatization of King Edward II's realm.

As it has been the object of so much critical attention over the decades, it is evident that Marlowe significantly extends the chroniclers' account of the king's death in the fifth act. The effect that the extended regicide has for the audience—and how it shifts the emotional tone of the play—is best summarized by Pearson as he explains:

> Prepared to see justice done and proper succession re-established, the audience instead witnesses a murder so affecting that it renovates even Edward's tarnished reputation. (…) Placing this creatively shocking scene directly before the anticipated conclusion of the play meddles with the audience's emotional barometer, causing a premature catharsis of sorts. The viewer desires their familiar history and a satisfactory succession to the renowned able king, Edward III. In a mild indictment of such lazy spectatorship, the play turns sharply away from justice toward criminality. (107)

As Pearson demonstrates by quoting several sources, "early modern chroniclers and historians and pamphleteers disagree on the manner of [Edward II's] death, but their protestations of ignorance appear squeamish rather than honest" (105). The chronicles hide and evade, or, in the case of Holinshed, they merely state succinctly the manner in which the king was assassinated. But what is shadowed in the Chronicles Marlowe drags into the light—the dramatic presence of *Light-born*, bearing a torchlight as he enters the dungeon where the king is captive, becomes wholly significant in this view[21]—by fully staging in front of the audience what in the Chronicles was conveyed

[21] 'Lightborn'—easily translatable as 'that who bears light'—is evidently the anglicized rendering of the Latin variant 'Lucifer'. The presence of the Devil of course charges the scene of Edward's killing with profound allegorical significance. It is associated, as Roger Sales explains, with the theatre of Hell,

as almost unspeakable. Rather than enacting the punishment and deaths of those who rebelled against the King, or dwelling on the celebrated installation of Edward III, the ending of *Edward II* extends and portrays in detail the king's torture and horrific death. By doing so, the would-be-tyrant is shown to be tyrannized over (Levin 126); the monarch becomes a victim, reversing traditional roles and, as a consequence, "the royal monopoly on violence is challenged" (Sales 117).

As Cartelli argues, the horror of King Edward's torture and death—"the stripped-down image Marlowe draws of the weak, enfeebled king, lying prone and submissive on his bed, while his murderers move purposefully about the room to execute a murder that is also a rape" (187)—is unmatched in the whole of Elizabethan drama, and actually enacts, dramatically, the 'deconsecration of sovereignty' that, in Moretti's classic argument, made of tragedy the "enabling medium of a 'real' king's eventual decapitation" (Cartelli 185-186). In Carletti's interpretation, the same long-term historical process described by Moretti as developing from English tragedy and culminating in the execution of Charles I in 1649, "Marlowe presents in the concentrated span of five acts and in a manner even more threatening to the residual claims of absolute sovereignty" (186). And yet, it is indubitable that as much as the final desecration of the king might threaten any "residual claim" of absolute and divine sovereign power, the action of desecration presupposes the notion of original sacredness. As Edwards notes, without a sense of sacredness of kingship, the act of sacrilegious violation is meaningless (64). Counter-discourses are only possible insofar as they stand in direct opposition to a main dominant discourse; in this case, the belief in divine sovereign authority that perhaps Marlowe "drew in from the Tudor air about him" (Edwards 64). This dominant discourse is in fact functional in Marlowe's play: it operates on a structural level, as it underlies, ideologically, the narrative pattern of the Waste Land myth that parallels the plot of the play. In other words, it determines the kind of "emplotment" (White 83) in which historical events are encoded in the play; subscribing Kernan's argument, such "emplotment" is in fact inherited from the Tudor

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insofar as the character is borrowed from the Chester Cycle of mystery plays (115), which arguably reinforces the divine nature of the events enacted on the stage: as God is implored to punish the barons' "unnatural revolt" by the repentant Earl of Kent, the Devil is to blame for such foul a crime as the horrific execution of the monarch. As Thurn notes, the scene of Edward's death is filled with morality conventions that "prop up an illusion of natural order" (126) as a resolution for the threat of violence on the scene. The illusion of natural order, however, shatters under the horror of the inhuman violence performed among the vain morality conventions in the scene, which are consequently revealed as emptied-out tokens of medieval representation.

chronicles, which, insofar as they detect in History "the sameness of ritual" (Kernan 264) arguably reshape past events into the plot of romance.

The plot of *Edward II* enacts the reign and eventual death of a weak king whose 'sickness' has caused his kingdom to be 'plagued' and who must be killed so the young legitimate heir might ascend to power. Such structure corresponds to the narrative (ritual) patterns found in the Chronicles (Kernan 264) which are, in fact, cognate with the narrative patterns of medieval romance, and more specifically, with the mythic tale of the Waste Land. Ritually, historically, and from a narrative perspective, the plot of Marlowe's play can only reach its climax in a 'killing-the-king' finale; but whether such final regicide brings about a sense of collective regeneration cannot be stated unambiguously. Social restoration and communal (spiritual) regeneration is the end result of the ritual movement that Kernan detects in Tudor historiography and the history plays,[22] as well as the resolution of romance in general and of the Waste Land myth specifically: when the unfit king dies, a strong legitimate successor takes his place; the kingdom is restored to prosperity, and social chaos is transformed into social stability. Such is the conclusion of *Edward II* on a plot level. Yet on a deeper ideological level, the ritualistic killing of the king is blatantly too brutal, too detailed, and too horrifying to bring a about a sense of collective spiritual regeneration. The unavoidable final act of desecration cannot restore a preternatural order through the restoration of political order, because inevitably, the 'deconsecration of sovereignty' is an act of desecration and demystification that cannot be taken back.

A DEMYSTIFYING CATHARSIS

The meaning that underlines the ritualistic killing of the king remains deeply ambiguous in *Edward II*. Mortimer insists that the murder must remain a secret, and thus entrusts Lightborn to execute the king in a clandestine manner so that "none shall know which way he died" (V. IV. 24). The king is not put to death publicly in a way that involves the subjects and thus reinforces the communal, ritualistic purpose of the allegedly

[22] As will be further explored in the following chapter, Kernan argues that, as it happens in *Edward II*, even as the ritualistic view of history is being questioned and challenged, it still sustains the plot structure of the History Plays. Ritual hence operates on a structural level, but the meaning that underlies the ritual structure—or, in other words, the mythical narrative that superimposes the ritual structure—is progressively undermined in the plays examined in this study.

regenerative killing. And yet, by means of Marlowe's dramatization of the secret murder, the effect of secrecy is reverted. The truth is brought to light, although it was meant to be hidden, and just as the king recalls "his previous reputation as a chivalrous knight" (Pearson 110), the stealthy murder acquires the nature of a true ritual sacrifice by virtue of being enacted in front of the audience. The purposes of the ritual and the regenerative movement of romance are salvaged. The audience is moved to terror and pity after witnessing the terrible violence onstage (Levin 125), and, from an Aristotelian perspective, such emotions are purged.[23] Through such a catharsis, the dramatic enactment of King Edward's murder arguably has a restorative effect on the audience; the killing of the king in Marlowe's play, then, somehow results in a form of social regeneration. But paradoxically, these extra-textual restorative effects of the ritual killing on scene—which might be extrapolated to all *tragic* re-enactments of historical events—bring about, as a consequence, the already explained subversion of the underlying ideology that sustains the dramatic pattern of the play, that is, the divinity of kingship that supports, in mythopoeic thought, the inextricable sympathetic connection between the king and the land. The matter of romance—through the filter of Tudor historiography—is reshaped to adopt the form of tragedy, but tragedy, as Moretti argued, "performs the degradation of the cultural image of the sovereign" (47) and in doing so "deprives the monarchy of its central bastion, its ultimate weapon" (47). Indeed, tragedy "stages not the institutions of absolutism, but its culture, its values, its ideology," and that is why it becomes the medium that performs "its task of dissolution" (47).

Edward II is a play in which, as critics have argued,[24] Ribner most notably, "the events of history [are] not (…) the working out in human affairs of a divine providence, but rather (…) the products of human strength and will which shape worldly events independently of any supernatural power" (246).[25] The tragic outcome of King Edward's life as dramatized in the play is man-made and not Providence-determined, but in the rhetoric employed by those rising up in arms against the weak, whimsical, and

[23] As it is commonly known, in the Aristotelian classical view, a tragedy is the imitation of a complete action of some magnitude, told in pleasant language and dramatic form, that arouses feelings of pity and terror in the audience so that those emotions can effectively be *relieved*, collectively (Aristotle 35).
[24] See, e.g., Levin.
[25] As Paul Bruda explains, ideas of history changed during the second half of the sixteenth century: "This change was not steady or regular, but, in broad terms, we may argue that early sixteenth-century history emphasized the first causes of events, the intervention of God into history. Late sixteenth-century history, under the influence of Guicciardini, Machiavelli, and Bodin, became concerned with second causes, with the intervention of men into history" (21).

irresponsible king, one may trace a generalized "abdication of social responsibility" (Sanders 403) implicit in the behaviour of all the characters. Individual responsibility spreads and diffuses all over the stage; as Orgel argued, "both politically and morally, the power-hungry nobles and the queen's adultery with Mortimer are as destabilizing as anything in Edward's relationship with his favourite" (423). If the civil war—the cure to *mend* the King, structurally—is deemed unnatural by Isabella and Kent, for, again, "Tis treason to be up against the King" (I.IV. 281), Edward's own violent determination, to, as Mortimer accuses him, "bathe [his] sword in subjects' blood" (III.II. 28), and in his own threatening words, to "make England's civil towns huge heaps of stones" (III.II. 31), make Warwick and even Kent regard the monarch as unnatural, too. As a consequence, "Marlowe's play renders any easy distinction between natural and unnatural impossible" (Archer 205), and there lies, arguably, the subversive force of the play. *Edward II* appropriates the chivalric rhetoric of romance in both the king's and the baron's approaches and justifications of war, only in passing, to barely conceal the meaningless and unjustifiable violence enacted upon the stage. It also draws from medieval mythology the narrative pattern of the Waste Land myth and the motif of the Maimed King, but as the dramatic action progresses into the final sacrificial regicide, the horror of the royal desecration irreparably undercuts the underlying mysticism of the tale.

As Moretti notes, "fully realized tragedy is the parable of the degeneration of the sovereign inserted in a context that *can no longer understand it*" (56). In the tragedy of Edward II as dramatized by Marlowe towards the end of the sixteenth century, the preternatural order of the world found in medieval romance, where chivalrous knights go on to battle and quest to mend the Maimed King and restore the Waste Land, is represented as a vain fiction, a rhetorical strategy; a feeble, fleeting idealization of violence and power politics that has no place in the world of Marlowe. For as Frye explains, "chivalric romance rationalizes the social structure of the feudal system, in which few medieval barons resembled the knights of the Round Table" (*Scripture* 177). In *Edward II*, the "emplotment" of romance is thus exposed and subverted. The representation of history, in hindsight, works in two opposite directions: it "enable[s] us to glimpse both the real events toward which it points and the devices of rhetoric upon which it invariably depends" (Thurn 119). In White's terms, "the historical narrative points in two directions simultaneously: *toward* the events described in the narrative and *toward* the story type or mythos which the historian has chosen to serve as the icon

of the structure of the events" (88). In *Edward II*, however, the "mythos" of the historical narrative is effectively denaturalized. Political order is restored in the figure of the legitimate successor, at but all delusions of naturalness and preternatural order in the organization and maintenance of (royal) power are radically crushed. As Greenblatt notes, "in *Edward II* Marlowe uses the emblematic method of admonitory drama, but uses it to such devastating effect that the audience recoils from it in disgust" (*Self-Fashioning* 203). The subversive forces in such representation of orthodox, dominant power strategies are undeniable. Greenblatt summarizes:

> If the theatre normally reflects and flatters the royal sense of itself as national performance, Marlowe struggles to expose the underlying motives of any performance of power. If the theatre normally affirms God's providence, Marlowe explores the tragic needs and interests that are served by all such affirmations. If the Elizabethan stage functions as one of the public uses of spectacle to impose normative ethical patterns on the urban masses, Marlowe enacts a relentless challenge to those patterns and undermines employment of rhetoric and violence in their service. (253)

In *Edward II*, the legitimizing narrative pattern of medieval mythology—that seems to validate the providential theory of kingship—structures the plot, but it does no longer contain the meaning, and, as a consequence, the play gives account, paradoxically, of what Thurn defined as "the failure of the fictions of sovereignty" (134). Marlowe's play thus initiates the dramatic enactment of a mythical change in the dramatization of royal authority that will develop throughout the established modes of representation in Elizabethan England, and which will be most eloquently exposed in Shakespeare's subsequent dramatization of English History. For historical Elizabethan drama does fundamentally relate to medieval myths of sovereignty but, in Moretti's words, "[tragedy], in its destruction of the medieval world picture, recognizes its importance, but destroys it nonetheless" (52).

CHAPTER 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *RICHARD II*: MYTH AND SUBVERSION IN THE HISTORIES

AN OLD-HISTORICIST MYTH

In his well-known study of Shakespeare's Histories, *Shakespeare Recycled*, Graham Holderness provides a rarely straightforward definition of the New Historicism critical movement and its study of early modern political drama. As Holderness explains, new-historicists are moved by their will "to grasp the relationships between literature and the larger cultural totality of history" (32). New Historicism, Holderness explains, "drew on post-structuralist theory and accepted 'history' only as a contemporary activity of narrating or representing the past" (32). The main hypothesis is that "historians reconstruct the past in the light of their own ideological preoccupations and constraints" (32) which becomes relevant for the study of Shakespeare's historical plays, since, as Kastan claims, "Shakespeare finds in the act of writing histories the deepest truth of history writing: that it is not the representation of the *past*, but the *representation* of the past" (181). In Holderness's terms, "if history is always a contemporary narrative, then what Tillyard saw as the intellectual spirit of an age[26] becomes merely that story the

[26] Tillyard's pioneering study of Shakespeare's history plays (1944), already quoted in the previous chapter, is considered by Holderness and other new-historicists as the epitome of 'Old Historicism'. Tillyard's core argument will be further on discussed in relation to the representation of mythical change in *Richard II*.

Tudor government wished to have told about its own rise to power and continuing dominance" (*Recycled* 32-33); and yet, once the notion of historical totality is replaced by the notion of History as a "partial" representation (Kastan 181), historical drama can be regarded as speaking "of diverse and contradictory ideologies" (Holderness *Recycled* 33).

Eloquently, what old-historicists believed to be "unified historical periods (such as the 'England of Elizabeth')", Holderness redefines as "a propagandist myth" (Holdeness *Recycled* 32). It is ambiguous whether he uses the word 'myth' to vaguely signify 'not true', which would be relevant only insofar as old-historicists would purport their historiographical account of Elizabethan England to be, in fact, true; or whether Holderness is more aware of what the term 'myth' may denote in this context. A myth, as will be recurrently established throughout this study, can be understood as a specific kind of narrative that articulates the dominant ideology of a specific social group and that thus possesses a fundamentally social teleology, insofar as it narrates in the form of a story a communal mystical credo that inherently unifies and sets in order a naturally diverse, hierarchical and conflictive community. Perhaps, mythologist Eleazar Meletinsky advanced the clearest definition of myth in this regard:

> Mythological thought is focused on 'metaphysical problems' (...) [but] myth is not the expression of primitive man's curiosity about the world. Its cognitive core is in fact geared to harmonizing the universe to such an extent that it does not admit of the slightest degree of chaos and disorder. Myth is fundamentally about the transformation of chaos into harmony, and primitive man defines harmony in such a way that it includes all the axiological and ethical aspects of life. (156)

Myth is a dominant, collectively known and accepted narrative, the primary function of which is to set the world in order. Insofar as myth fictitiously fabricates a harmonized universe, it also determines the social ethics and axioms that are derived from the ordered natural world found in mythology. Ultimately, myth does not simply explain the world, but also organizes civilization, and so the traditional, old-historicist interpretation of Shakespeare's Histories might be considered, to all extents, mythical. The mythic tale allegedly dramatized in the plays is what Tillyard refers to as the "theme of England" (141), which he equates with "the theme of Republica" (303) and defines as "epic" inasmuch as it treats "not merely the fortunes but the very nature of England" (303). Holderness summarizes this interpretation:

> Shakespeare's 'theme of England' is in one sense historical—a vision of the providential pattern implicit in the development of a historical process from Richard II to Henry VII—but in a larger sense it is what Tillyard calls 'epic'—a dramatization of the whole texture and experience of English life, lived between the reality of 'disorder' (dynastic struggle, rebellion, civil war) and the potentiality of 'order' (a static and hierarchical but well-governed state). Just as the great 'order' of the cosmos supervises and contains its internal 'disorder', so the upheavals of English society between 1399 and 1485 are constrained within a grand conception of the 'order' which the nation represents. (*Recycled* 26)

As the ordered cosmos contains all chaotic life, the ordered, cosmological, *mythical* narrative of history can contain—and set in order—the chaos of reality. Reality is chaotic, but mythical narratives have the power to set it—that is, *represent* it—in order.[27] And such is, indeed, the ideological agenda of the so-called 'Tudor myth', a specific narrative detected by critics after World War II in the plays of Shakespeare that dramatize the events that lead to Henry VII's ascension to the throne. This myth—debatably an ideological imposition of critics upon not just the Histories but also the Tudor chronicles that served as sources for the plays[28]—supposedly aimed at legitimizing the union of the houses of York and Lancaster through Henry VII's marriage to the York heiress, mythically construed as "the providential and happy ending of an organic piece of history" (Tillyard 36).[29] But this Tudor myth not only narrated Henry VII's reign as an organic and providential historical occurrence; as far as this study is concerned, it bears suggestive implications the fact that, as Tillyard notes

[27] This is, in fact, the explicitly stated principle that dictates the reinterpretation of pre-modern myth in literary modernism which, as will be examined further on, constitutes one of the most relevant reutilizations of the Waste Land myth in the Anglo-American literary tradition. Arguably, as this study aims to demonstrate, this principle is at the root of all processes of mythical representation and reinterpretation at the different stages of tradition explored throughout this study.

[28] The Tudor myth has been traditionally argued by critics such as Lily B. Campbell and Tillyard to be widely extended in the contemporary historiographical works of Polydore Virgil, Hall, Sir Walter Raleigh and others (Bevington 316). Yet more recent criticism has claimed that sixteenth-century chronicles did not articulate a unified and coherent ideological stance (Kewes 183), at least as far as Holinshed's work is concerned. Most convincingly, Annabel Patterson's seminal *Reading Holinshed's Chronicles* argues that derogating ideas about Holinshed's "providentialist theory of history, to legitimate particular dynasty" were in fact produced in the context of World War II, "when a providentialist view of national destiny was particularly acceptable" (5). Patterson demonstrates that "a heavy-handed emphasis on morality and political obedience" (6) in Holinshed's *Chronicles* is found specifically in their editorial comment, but whatever legitimating intent has been traditionally attributed to Holinshed's writing, it cannot stand when contrasted with "the unevenness of tone, attitude, and opinion that the Chronicles, if read with different assumptions, now seem to register" (6). Goy-Blanquet concurs in her own study of England's historiography when she claims that Holinshed follows Hall and Vergil on their accounts of the York and Lancaster reigns "with heavy cuts on the providential comments" (63) that are later on undone by Abraham Fleming, the copy-editor or a revised version of Holinshed's *Chronicles*.

[29] The mythical identification between political restoration and the typically happy ending of romance executed through marriage will be challenged further in the following two chapters of this study, specifically through the analysis of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Scott's *Waverley*.

as he defines the allegations of the Tudor myth, Henry VII also stated his claim to the British throne as deriving from his Welsh ancestry, which allowed him to reactivate the ancient Welsh belief that King Arthur would return again (Tillyard 36). In this view, Henry VII and his Tudor descendants were in fact the descendants of Arthur's lineage,[30] and, even though such mythical association is not made explicit in Shakespeare's historical drama, it certainly encourages the hypothesis that the mythical dimension to be traced in plays such as *Richard II* (ca. 1595), insofar as it may reflect (even though distortedly) Tudor historiography, is cognate with romance mythology. The mythical reconfiguration of the historical events leading up to the installation of the Tudor dynasty that supposedly legitimize such ascension as being natural and providential are in fact ideologically analogous to the direct inclusion of the Tudor monarchs in the ancestry of King Arthur and, as such, both mythologizing strategies arguably draw from the myths of romance in order to apprehend history and remake it into an ordered, legitimizing and naturalizing narrative.

As Habib pointedly explains, traditional Shakespearean criticism has argued that the characters portrayed in the Histories are represented as simply enacting "an unbroken providential pattern of sin and expiation" (72). Such pattern corresponds, in narrative form, with the Tudor myth, which, as Habib summarizes, rearranged historical events so as to fit a very specific and ideologically charged narrative:

> Richard of Bordeaux's deposition by Henry Bolingbroke [was] a grievous sin for which the English nation was punished by the protracted and bloody Yorkist-Lancastrian civil war and the murderous reign of Richard III. England's suffering was seen to end only when Richard of Gloucester's defeat and death at the hands of Henry Richmond at the battle of Bosworth. Descended from the fabulous Arthur and Cadwallader on the one hand and the Lancastrian line of Gaunt on the other, Richmond, or Henry VII as he subsequently came to be known, was the first of a long and illustrious line of Tudors who were to restore England to its former prosperity and greatness. (Habib 73)

Such a narrative, as can be easily observed, corresponds to the letter with the already mentioned ritualistic pattern that Alvin Kernan recognizes as the structure that

[30] As Tillyard notes (37-38), this idea persisted in the time of Elizabeth, as illustrated in the third canto of the third book of Spenser's allegorical epic *The Faerie Queene* (1590-1596), in which Merlin prophesizes the restoration of the linage of the ancient British king in the installation of the Tudor dynasty, "of [whose] royall maiesty and soueraigne name; so shall the Briton bloud their crowne againe reclame" (Spenser 3. III. XLVIII).

underlines Tudor historiography.[31] But since the notion that Holinshed's *Chronicles* do in fact articulate the legitimizing Tudor myth has been critically challenged in recent years,[32] it may be useful to reduce the specifics of this Tudor narrative to its mythical core, which in fact allows for the reformulation of the story in terms closer to the ritual archetype described by Kernan: in the Tudor myth codified by Tillyard, a weak king is overthrown by self-servicing, power-hungry usurpers, and consequently the kingdom becomes a waste land until the ascension of a strong legitimate king, who restores the land to its prosperity. Such a pattern, i.e., the narrative of a desolate kingdom being ultimately repaired, evidently coincides with the plot structure of the Waste Land myth, as the Arthurian myth of restoration narrates the story of the Maimed King's waste kingdom, which is restored to its physical fertility and spiritual wealth when the Grail—or the meaning behind the Grail—is discovered and the king is either restored to health or, in later versions of the story, allowed to die so a strong heir can take his place. This narrative, in its archetypal form, is seemingly mirrored in the story of political restoration dramatized in Shakespeare's two historical tetralogies;[33] however, the aim of this chapter is to explore the complex process of mythical representation and reinterpretation as enacted only in *Richard II*, the first play of the second tetralogy—the first play, diachronically, in terms of the historical events it represents—which arguably dramatizes, on a smaller scale, the same mythical change that Kernan attributes to the whole of Shakespeare's second tetralogy (ca. 1595-1599), made up of Shakespeare's major history plays, namely: *Richard II*, *1 Henry IV*, *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V*.

[31] See previous chapter, p. 48.
[32] See note 28 to this chapter, p. 57.
[33] It should be noted that the subscription to descriptive labels such as first and second tetralogy is employed throughout this chapter as, quoting Kewes, a "useful critical shorthand" (186). As Kewes notes, "no such sense of wholeness and pattern would have been accessible to Elizabethan audiences" (186) and it is undoubtedly true that "the plays themselves are so very different, even in their use and understanding of history, that it is hard to see them as the tessarae of a single mosaic" (Kastan 175). Yet the consideration *in toto* is certainly useful for the critical endeavour. Snyder, on the hypothesis that because of their "open-ended, *in media res* quality, critics of the histories have sought a larger framework in which to comprehend them" (91), detects among several comprehensive interpretations of the histories a constant of "mythic loss and renewal" (92) that is crucial for the critical exploration of *Richard II* carried out in this chapter.

THE FALL FROM EDEN TO WASTE LAND

According to Kernan, Shakespeare's major history plays can be characterized as epic insofar as they enact a "large-scale, heroic action" and trace "the movement of a nation or people through violent change from one condition to another" (270).[34] Specifically, the transition dramatized is the "passage from the England of Richard II to the England of Henry V" (270); that is to say, allegedly, the transformation from Waste Land to (a sort of recovered) Eden.[35] The story enacted to depict this transformation is the story of a dynastic shift, which in fact operates as "the supporting framework" (Kerman 270) for a broad set of transitions—historical, political, psychological, spatial, temporal, and, at last, *mythical*—that "run parallel to the main action, giving it body and *meaning*" (270, my italics). The meaning of the story (or history) enacted does not derive then from its "supportive framework," or ritualistic (mythical) structure, but from the broader transitions that the dynastic shift onstage brings about. Kernan summarizes these transitions:

> In historical terms, the movement is the passage from the middle ages to the Renaissance and the modern world. In political and social terms it is a movement from feudalism and hierarchy to the national state and individualism. In psychological terms it is a passage from a situation in which man knows with certainty who he is to an existential condition in which identity is only a temporary role. In spatial and temporal terms it is a movement from a closed world to an infinite universe. In mythical terms the passage is from garden world to a fallen world. In the most summary terms it is a movement from ceremony and ritual to history. (270)

If the alleged Tudor myth narrates the redemption of Bolingbroke's original crime in deposing and murdering Richard II, through the victory and ascension to power of the Tudor dynasty, after the retribution of chaos and bloodshed during the War of the Roses, it hardly seems consistent to argue, on the one hand, that Shakespeare's history plays subscribe the Tudor myth, and, on the other, that the second tetralogy, in mythical

[34] This comprehensive interpretation of the so-called second tetralogy is subscribed only insofar as it introduces the hypothesis of a "mythical change" that is functional in Shakespeare's Histories. The aim of this chapter, however, is to translate the argument from an analysis of the overall structure of the second tetralogy to a more focused interpretation of *Richard II* as an independent play.

[35] As it will be explained in depth in the following chapter, such is indeed the transition narrated in all forms of romance (see p. 82). The myth of the Waste Land—perhaps the myth of romance *par excellence*—illustrates this movement of the romance mode explicitly. Of course, the appropriation of romance patterns for the dramatization of history brings about a set of significant changes to this fundamental narrative, as it will be explored throughout this chapter.

terms, dramatizes the passage from a garden world to a fallen world; unless, of course, this fallen world is redeemable (and, perhaps, already redeemed in advanced through the events dramatized in the first tetralogy). In this view, the second tetralogy would comprehensively enact the initial fall from Eden to Waste Land, only for that degenerative movement to have been pre-emptively reversed, so to speak, in the first tetralogy. This argument is problematic. Arguably, the second tetralogy is resolved with the triumph and celebration of Henry V's installation, the legitimate and vigorous successor of the usurper Henry IV; and, even though such (perhaps superficial) interpretation of *Henry V* has been heavily contested in recent criticism,[36] it makes little sense that the mythical change—from garden world to fallen world—that seemingly accompanies the rest of transitions found in Shakespeare's major history plays, which signal the passage into the modern age, would be so simplistically reversed. In other words, if the mythical change that can arguably be traced in the second tetralogy—and on a smaller but more focused scale, will be traced in *Richard II* throughout this chapter—is reversed in the first tetralogy, so that the Waste Land is once again restored into an paradisal garden, then there is no mythical change at all to account for the ideological transformation depicted however through the historical, political, psychological, and spatial and temporal transitions that are dramatized in the plays. If Shakespeare's history plays simply enact (and validate) the Tudor myth, or straightforwardly represent onstage the alleged ritual structure of the chronicles, then they dramatize no significant mythical change as taking place in the transition from the middle ages into the modern world, as they would simply deploy the same restoration-of-Eden pattern characteristic of medieval romance. But as this chapter aims to demonstrate through a myth-critical exploration of *Richard II*, such is in fact not the case.

[36] See, most notably, Dollimore and Sinfield's influential essay "History and Ideology: The Instance of Henry V", among others: e.g., Rabkin 50-51, Greenblatt, *Negotiations*, 56-65, or Mark 74. Greenblatt summarizes this line of thought in his claim that "the Henry plays confirm the Machiavellian hypothesis that princely power originates in force and fraud even as they draw their audience toward an acceptance of that power" (*Negotiations* 65). And even though "the world of Henry V (…) looks much like a restoration of the English Eden, ordered, prosperous and united under a hero king (…) [sovereign] identity is now no longer God-given but only a role within which an individual is imprisoned by political necessity" (Kernan 298). The "unchanging patterns of order" (298) of feudal England have crumbled and so, symbolically, "the restored English garden, the beehive state, is superimposed on the ruined garden of France, a weed-filled, untilled wilderness" (298). In fact, in *Henry V* as well as in the other histories, contemporary ideological conflicts are made explicit through ambivalence, since "[the king's] political and military successes are given great emphasis, but Shakespeare embeds their telling in a complex set of non-historical qualifying frames—the idealizing choruses and the comic plot—that make the restructured historical material seem manifestly partial, and that leave Henry's glory vulnerable to the contrasts and contradictions that are produced" (Kastan 177). See also note 53 to this chapter, p. 73.

The functionality of the so-called Tudor myth in Shakespeare's history plays is limited to the outward structure of the historical plot, which evidently mirrors the seemingly ritualistic structure of Tudor historiography. However, the Tudor Myth as it is debatably featured in the history plays—and, specifically, as it is debatably featured in *Richard II*—is reinterpreted in a way that, what is *ab origine* conceived as a myth of regeneration is in fact reshaped into a myth of *degeneration* that depicts England's *irreversible* transition from garden world to Waste Land. More explicitly than in Marlowe's *Edward II*, the restoration of political order in *Richard II* in the figure of Henry IV—which structurally mirrors the from-chaos-to-order pattern of medieval romance—is not accompanied by a spiritual regeneration that would give account of the cosmological correspondence between the natural and political worlds found in romance mythology. The result of the actions onstage is the restoration of political order, but such restoration of order is unaccompanied by the expected spiritual regeneration of the kingdom which, in purely mythical terms, remains a Waste Land after the deposition and killing of the Maimed King.

RICHARD'S PRIMAL CRIME

Ingeniously, the mythical change dramatized in *Richard II* is perfectly codified in the first scenes of the play, in which "the heavy accent on ritual and pageant (…) make[s] us impatient with a cloying ceremony which we later discover is simply a disguise for anarchy" (Mack 27). On a larger scale, the same argument can be extended to the play itself, since even though it stands out by the "elaborately ceremonial and ritualistic character of its action" (Holderness *Recycled* 50), it in fact dramatizes a situation as chaotic and disordered as the beginning of a civil war that would prolong for a century. Ritual and myth[37] operate then as structuring devices that attempt to set a chaotic reality in order but that eventually reveal, through reinterpretation, the futility of such, as Holderness would call them in the voice of recent criticism, "strategies of legitimation" (*Recycled* 21).

[37] The association of ritual and myth as subsequent stages in the narrative evolution of the Waste Land myth was already mentioned in the previous chapter (see p. 47) and, as it was explained in the introduction, will be explored in detail in following chapters that analyse texts in which the myth-ritualistic reinterpretation of the myth is explicit. See, e.g., chapters 6, 7 and 11.

Richard II begins with the dispute between Bolingbroke and Mowbray over the murder of the Duke of Gloucester, which Richard originally acquiesces should be resolved by means of a trial by combat. Yet before the tournament can take place Richard interrupts it, effectively frustrating a ritual of justice, which is "based upon the assumption that right makes might" (Rackin 79). Such an assumption, of course, is also at the root of feudalism as a political system and, by extension, of the divine authority of the king as God's anointed (Rackin 79), which allows for the interpretation that, through his deposition and death, "Richard II experiences the results of his own abrogation of the order which maintains him" (Billington 120). Richard II invalidates the rituals that are sustained by the same mystical principle that supports his royal authority and, in doing so, as Holderness notices, Richard is transformed: he is no longer a feudal king, but has rather become an absolutist king (*Recycled* 56).[38]

Critics such as Rackin have argued that "Richard is the only king in the two tetralogies with an unambiguous hereditary claim to the throne, rooted in an uncontended genealogy and ratified by divine right. The medieval word—and with it the possibility of ritualized judicial combat—disappears with his deposition" (52). Yet it seems more convincing to hypothesize that this 'medieval world' that Rackin mentions does not dissipate with the deposition (and murder) of Richard, but that it in fact vanishes *during* Richard's reign and as a consequence of his own rejection of feudalism. As Phialas notes, "the contrast established in the play is not between life during Richard's reign and that of the Tudors; the contrast is between Richard's enfeebled and devitalized England on the one hand and, on the other, England's national strength and international prestige during the reign of Richard's ancestors" (308).[39] The debasement of ritual, as Holderness explains, accounts for the validity of Phialas's argument:

> The conflict which ultimately leads to the king's deposition is not a conflict between old and new, between absolute medieval monarchy and new Machiavellian power-politics. It is a conflict between the king's sovereignty and the ancient code of chivalry, which is here firmly located in the older and more primitive tribal and family code of blood-vengeance (…) Richard subsequently

[38] As Knowles notes, Holinshed in fact reports that Richard II often used trial by combat as "a legal method of killing off the disaffected baronage" (53). It can thus be argued that Shakespeare's depiction of Richard's debasement of ritual in fact stands as dramatic (and mythical) equivalent to Richard's historical transformation of ritual justice into a (tyrannical) political weapon (Knowles 53).

[39] Arguably, it is this notion that allows for an identification of Richard's reign as dramatized by Shakespeare with the contemporary political situation of Elizabeth's England, as Richard's government does not feature in the play as the (lost) ancient order contrasting with modern times, but in fact as the original destabilization of the (mythical) ordered world that antedated Richard's deleterious reign.

> attempts to affirm a policy of royal absolutism, which insists on the king's prerogative overriding the procedures of chivalric law. Richard's political response to this constant clamouring for power on the part of the feudal lords, is to impose a policy of *absolutism*. (*Recycled* 56)[40]

Indeed, in the first scene of the play, Bolingbroke justifies the necessity of a trial by combat:

> Further I say, and further will maintain
> Upon his bad life to make all this good,
> That he did plot the Duke of Gloucester's death,
> Suggest his soon-believing-adversaries,
> And consequently, like a traitor coward,
> Sluiced out his innocent soul through streams of blood;
> Which blood, like sacrificing Abel's, cries
> Even from the tongueless caverns of the earth
> To me for justice and rough chastisement.
> And, by the glorious worth of my descent,
> This arm shall do it, or this life be spent. (I.I. 98-108)

As Holderness explains, "the code of chivalry enables Bolingbroke to regard *himself* as a responsible administrator of justice, because blood-vengeance of kin and justice are for him synonymous: he is speaking the language of an ancient code of feudal values. He believes that his 'glorious descent' (…) gives *him* greater responsibility for prosecuting the law than the king himself" (*Recycled* 59). The scene introduces the dramatic action and anticipates the conflict to unfold by presenting a power struggle between Richard and Bolingbroke, and Bolingbroke takes control by articulating that power struggle within the ideology of chivalry (Holderness *Recycled* 59). Two scenes later, the king, so as to not relinquish his sovereign prerogative to the power of chivalric law, interrupts the ritual as it is about to be performed, replacing the procedures of chivalric justice with his sovereign (and absolutist) authority. Under the pretext that "our kingdom's earth should not be soiled / With that dear blood which it had fostered" (I.III. 125-126), Richard settles the conflict by banishing Mowbray "never to return" (I.III. 152) and Bolinbroke "Till twice five summers have enriched our fields"

[40] Richard II's absolutist disregard of nobility and his transformation of parliament into "an instrument of his will" (Knowles 53) is in fact reported in Holinshed's *Chronicles*: "Manie other things were doone in this parliament [at Shrewsbury, 1398] . . . namelie, for that diuerse rightfull heires were disherited of their lands and liuings . . . the King and those that were about him. . . came into great infamie and slander . . . the King . . . forgot himselfe, and began to rule by will more than by reason, threatening death to each one that obeied not his inordinate desires . . . the lords of the realme began to fear their owne estates, being in danger of his furious outrage, whome they tooke for a man destitute of sobrietie and wisdome" (qt. in Knowles 53).

(I.III. 141). The randomness of the King's absolutist justice, blatantly opposed to the honour and preternatural order embodied in the ancient code of chivalry, is made manifest when he "pluck[s] away" (I.III. 211) four years of Bolingbroke's sentence. The capriciousness of the king's royal absolutism does not go unnoticed by Bolingbroke, who meaningfully reflects: "How long a time lies in one little word! / Four lagging winters and four wanton springs / End in a word—such is the breath of kings" (I.III. 213-215).

The biting irony of Bolingbroke's words eloquently emphasizes the arbitrariness of the new absolutist order that replaces the ancient code of feudal values, which ordered the world through ritual practice. And yet, the king's transgression of the old order of feudalism goes further than his invalidation of its rituals. In fact, the extraordinary significance of Bolingbroke's speech in the first scene, when he follows the primitive code of blood-vengeance and takes upon himself the responsibility of prosecuting the law against Mowbray, lies not primarily on the appeal to the ancient code of feudal values that Richard demolishes under his royal absolutism, but in the underlying implication that Bolingbroke accusation (and prosecution of law) is not meant against Mowbray at all, but instead directed at the true murderer of Gloucester: Richard himself. For as Stanley Wells explains in his editorial notes to the scene, it was the common view on the matter in Shakespeare's time that Mowbray had truly murdered the Duke of Gloucester while he was in his custody, but he had done so at Richard's instigation (I.I. 100n).[41] And so the king is not responsible for the dismantlement of the old order because he has invalidated its rituals, leaving only their outward meaningless form; on the contrary, formal order can only be a travesty and all rituals must be aborted, frustrated and ultimately inverted—as in the famous scene of Richard's self-deposition in Act IV—after the king's perpetration of the 'primal crime' that Bolingbroke unflinchingly identifies with Cain's fratricide.[42] In mythical terms, Richard's murder of his kinsman is the event that propels the passage from garden world to fallen world.

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[41] Holinshed writes: "The King sent unto Thomas Mowbray … to make the Duke secretly away (…) [and Mowbray] caused his servants to cast featherbeds upon him, and so smother him to death, or otherwise to strangle him with towels (as some write)" (qt. I.I. 100n)

[42] "That *he* did plot the Duke of Gloucester's death (…) / Sluiced out his *innocent* soul through *streams of blood*; / Which blood, like *sacrificing Abel's*, cries / Even from the tongueless caverns of the *earth*" (I.III. 100, 103-105, my italics). The emphasis added illustrates the imagery of (perverse) blood libation that will become recurrent in the language that dramatizes the civil war and Richard's regicide later on in the play. The inversion of regeneration rituals that can be traced in this imagery of blood libation will be examined further on.

As Robert A. Paul argued, following Malinwoski, the 'primal crime' was considered by Freud in his seminal *Totem and Taboo* (1913) as "the decisive event by which culture arose out of nature" (314).[43] Certainly, the symbolization of Gloucester's murder as counterpart to Cain's killing of Abel in *Richard II* does signal a transition from an old world to a new one. The old world—or garden world—is a mythical world, steadily balanced in a perfect equilibrium between the natural and the social spheres, arbitrated through ritual; whereas the new world disrupts such natural balance inasmuch as it dismantles the meaning that underlies the myths and rituals of the old world. As a sort of primal crime, Richard's murder of Gloucester re-enacts the second original sin, Cain's fratricide, which, as Byron demonstrates in drawing from a long list of interpreters, is commonly regarded in biblical exegesis as the sin "that brought death into the world" (225). Abel's is the first recorded death in the Bible and, through the murder of Gloucester, from Bolingbroke's perspective, Richard has reactivated the crime—not the first sin, which was Adam's sin of disobedience; but the second sin, for so many exegetes worse than the original sin (Byron 225): the taboo crime of kin-killing that results in the annihilation of the old order.[44]

Cain's God-given punishment in *Genesis* is very specific. He is banished "from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden" (*KJB*, Gen. 4.16) after God passes his sentence: "When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth" (*KJB*, Gen. 4.12). Cain is banished to wander the east of Eden and literally punished to inhabit a wasteland;[45] to work a land that, like the Maimed King's mythical kingdom, will not yield any fruit. In *Richard II*, Cain's punishment is mirrored in Mowbray's irreversible banishment, but just as Mowbray had received the displaced accusation of the crime committed by Richard, he also receives the displaced

[43] Freud writes: "One day the brothers who had been driven out came together, killed and devoured their father and so made an end of the patriarchal horde (…) The totem meal, which is perhaps mankind's earliest festival, would this be a repetition and a commemoration of the memorable and criminal deed, which was the beginning of so many things—of social organization, or moral restrictions and of religion (…) After they had got rid of [the father], had satisfied their hatred and had put into effect their wish to identify themselves with him (…) a sense of guilt made its appearance, which in this instance coincided with the remorse felt by the whole group (…) They revoked their deed by forbidding the killing of the totem, the substitute for their father; and they renounced its fruits by resigning their claim to the women who had now been set free. They thus created out of their filial sense of guilt the two fundamental taboos of totemism" (Freud 141-143)

[44] See previous note.

[45] The west/east dichotomy as correlative to the mythical antinomy Eden/Waste Land is recurrent in some of the representations and reinterpretations of the Waste Land myth in Anglo-American literature, more explicitly, as it will be discussed further on, in F. Scott. Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (see chapter 9, p. 247).

punishment that stands as retribution for the true sinner. Mowbray's banishment may thus be interpreted, symbolically, as the displacement of Richard's Cain-like banishment; that is, his condemnation to govern the Waste Land.

In this view, the first scene of Shakespeare's play already characterizes Richard as a king who, through the perpetration of a taboo murder and the obliteration of the code of feudalism and the invalidation of its rituals, has become counterpart to the mythical Maimed King. Suffering the punishment for his crime—displaced in Mowbray's banishment—the king reigns over a symbolic Waste Land, clearly the ideological (and mythical) opposite of the "demi-paradise" (II.I. 42) described in Gaunt's famous speech that recalls the England that antedated Richard as, literally, "this other Eden" (II.I. 42). But before reassessing Gaunt's memorable depiction of the idealised and paradisal England that preceded Richard's primal crime, it is crucial to consider the fact that the Cain and Abel analogy does not feature only in the characterization of Richard drawn from the first scene of the play. In fact, as Liebler notes, the biblical analogy operates as "the bracketing format of the play" (74), as *Richard II* closes with Bolingbroke, now King Henry, banishing Exton after the latter has murdered Richard at Bolingbroke's instigation. In doing so, King Henry evades all responsibility through an action that reverses the character's position at the beginning of the play:

> They love not poison that do poison need;
> Nor do I thee. Though I did wish him dead,
> I hate the murderer, love him murdered.
> The guilt of conscience take though for thy labour,
> But neither my good word nor princely favour.
> With Cain go wander through shades of night,
> And show thy head by day nor light. (V.VI. 38-44)

The role reversal is unquestionable: now King Henry IV has committed the taboo crime of kin-killing, displacing the action in the hands of an emissary. Exton replaces Mowbray as the material perpetrator of the crime on behalf of the king and, inevitably, also replaces him as the recipient of the punishment. Like Mowbray, and like Cain, Exton is banished; but also like Mowbray, Exton stands merely as the king's proxy. Like Richard, then, Henry—also guilty now of Cain's primal crime—is condemned to suffer Cain's punishment: to become king of the Waste Land, east of Eden. Consequently, at the end of the play political order is re-established, but "the other Eden" mourned by Gaunt is irretrievable. The Waste Land can no longer be restored.

KILLING THE KING

Reassessing Kernan's classic argument, the second tetralogy does not simply dramatize a mythical change that took place along with the ideological transition that resulted from the passage into the modern era—let alone one that would have been immediately reversed (and thus annulled) by the first tetralogy and its apparent celebration of the Tudor installation to power. More significantly, perhaps, the histories, *Richard II* definitely from its opening scene, gives account of a 'mythical change' that is made manifest in the representation of the contemporary world as counterpart to the mythical Waste Land. If, as already argued, the chronicles are archetypically shaped—or "emplotted," to recover Hayden White's hypothesis about the *mythos* of historical narratives[46]—in the form of romance mythology, romance mythology is then inextricable from Shakespeare's histories. But within the structural framework of romance—always retelling "the victory of fertility over the waste land" (Frye *Anatomy* 193), mirrored in the historiographical account of the civil war, from Richard's murder to Henry VII's ascension to the throne—a myth-critical analysis of *Richard II* allows for the hypothesis that the history plays do in fact reinterpret the somehow mythical narratives they exploit so as to challenge their underlying ideology. As in Richard's court, in *Richard II* ritual and ceremony attempt to set in order the dramatization of chaos performed on the stage; but as in Richard's court as well, the ritualistic pattern of the play—extendible to the ritualistic pattern of the second tetralogy, and of both tetralogies combined, if one adopts the comprehensive critical interpretation—can barely hide a generalized state of chaos, corruption and degeneration that can no longer be redeemed through formal, outward order.

Not long after the prolific work of the myth and ritual school of thought,[47] John Dover Wilson claimed that "*Richard II* ought to be played throughout as ritual" (XIII) since "the heart of the play" reveals "a sacramental quality in the agony and death of the sacrificial victim, as it were of the god slain upon the altar, which we to-day can only begin to understand by reading a book like *The Golden Bough*" (XVI). The possibility of interpreting Shakespeare's play from the perspective of myth-ritualism is tempting despite the dangers of incurring in several anachronisms when attributing a Frazerian ideology or intent to the early modern play. After all, rituals are all-pervasive in the text,

[46] See previous chapter, p. 37.
[47] See introduction, p. 15.

and the ritualistic pattern that arguably structures the second tetralogy has already been established through Kernan's well-known argument in this regard. But even if subscribing to the hypothesis that the 'killing-the-king' motif that articulates the plot constitutes an indubitably ritualistic structure, Richard's death can only be regarded as yet another of the many futile, emptied-out, frustrated and ultimately meaningless rituals that give form (and order) to the play, without however providing a unifying, stable or unchallenged meaning—let alone delivering any sort of redemption. Linda Woodbridge summarizes what would be a superficial myth-ritualistic interpretation of the play, relating Richard's murder with the mystic meaning of vegetation rites:

> Richard II is a force of sterility: his tears and sighs 'shall lodge [beat down] the summer corn, / And make a dearth' (III. III. 162-63); gardeners lament his land's metaphorical ruined vegetation (III. IV. 43-49); he is linked with winter and feels like a snowman (IV. I. 259-263); his rival is identified with spring and sunshine (V. II. 46-50). Richard's death is a human sacrifice renewing vegetation: his successor says Richard's blood has sprinkled him to make him grow (V.VI. 45-46). Bolingbroke's imagery hunts at a new sky god, come to inseminate Earth: he will 'lay the summer's dust with show'rs'; 'on the earth I rain / my waters' (III.III. 42-60). Rites of carrying out Death and bringing in the Green Man peep through the scene where London welcomes Bolingbroke's procession and expels Richard (...) Several passages recall *sparagmos*, dismemberment and sprinkling the earth with blood for fertility. (193)

This reading is certainly cognate with the argument that *Richard II* represents onstage the myth of the Waste Land rather straightforwardly. As a "force of sterility," Richard could be interpreted as counterpart to the mythical Fisher King, and his final killing—the sacrificial regicide carried out by his successor—could then be understood as a ritual death meant to bring about the regeneration of Richard's wasted kingdom. But as already explained, Bolingbroke is guilty of Cain's primal crime in the same way that Richard is, and consequently both share their retribution: to till (and reign) the land that will not bear fruit. As Woodbridge notices, "magical meanings that tease us through *Richard II* are constantly subverted" (194). Indeed, "if Richard is sacrificial victim, king slain to restore the land's fertility, the magic doesn't work: the blood manuring the ground is an image of civil war. Far from redemptive, the king's death brings a curse on England, decades of war and debilitation" (194). The natural cycle of myth is arrested: "the earth cannot revive, the victim['s] sacrifice brings no renewal" (194). Such an effect derives from the fact that, as Woodbridge explains, "the English history play is (...) acted not on a timeless sacramental plane but in a historical, political world; its

Realpolitik shatters its ritual framework" (196) in the same way, in fact, that Richard's absolutism on the one hand, and Bolingbroke's usurpation on the other, shatter the ideology that sustained the rituals of the old order that are now dismantled throughout the play.[48] Liebler explains:

> The joust is (or would have been) one of several ritual events depicted in the play whose close observation mark the normative relationship of king and state but here, in Richard's crisis of kingship, are aborted or evacuated of meaning. Close examination of those rituals and of the way Richard handles them in his crisis reveals a complex portrait of the king as one who attempts to hold on to certain aspects of a traditional order while violating others. Since that order is itself in the process of change, Richard participates in but does not control the destruction of tradition, at the same time, of himself. (60)

It is, after all, Richard's destruction of the old order that leads to his own death. At the beginning of the play, the trial-by-combat that Richard interrupts and replaces with his royal prerogative would have "close[d] the rupture in the kingdom" (Liebler 64) but it is instead presented as "theatricalized and ambiguous" (64). By extension, Richard's annulment of such ritualistic force ends up eroding "the sacred permanence of the king's enthronement" (64). Kingship rituals—and thus kingship mysticism—are also evacuated of meaning, and such is the function of "all the travesties of formal order (…) [that] punctuate the play with instances of rituals aborted, inverted, and finally rejected in favour of a new order" (65). But that new order, terribly, only "proved more disordered than Richard's" (65). Carlisle prophesizes, after Bolingbroke's triumph:

> And if you crown him, let me prophesy
> The blood of English shall manure the ground,
> And future ages groan for this foul act.
> Peace shall go sleep with Turks and infidels,
> And in this seat of peace tumultuous wars
> Shall kin with kin, and king with kind, confound.
> Disorder, horror, fear, and mutiny
> Shall here inhabit, and this land be called,
> The field of Golgotha and dead men's skulls. (IV. I. 136-144)

[48] In different words, Knowles concurs: "the shadow and substance of political reality are something altogether different. The shadow is *the emptiness of metaphysical kingship* and the substance is that of Machiavellian realpolitik negotiating legitimacy by proto-constitutional means" (65, my italics).

The notion that new life can only spring from death but that, by the same token, death can only breed renewed forms of life that are born already swollen with death is a constant in the reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth as a myth of degeneration.[49] In the case of *Richard II*, Carlisle's prophesy certifies the failure of the regicidal ritual enacted onstage to bring about the restoration of the Waste Land. Liebler eloquently explains:

> The kin-killing, civil war, will turn England into its own *pharmakos* whose blood will fertilize the soil, but the dead crop of the 'cursed earth' is only skulls. Properly conducted in a culture where such rites still have active meaning, a blood libation would insure fertility, but this England-in-transition has sacrificed its rituals under Richard and will continue to do so in the (dis)order under Bolingbroke. (68)[50]

The abandonment of ritual can only bring about an irreparable state of degeneration, the surrender to ever recover the "demi-paradise" that Gaunt mourned as he lay dying. Following Kernan, Liebler concludes:

> The restorative function of uncrowning followed by new crowning is absent from the play because the redressive capabilities of such rituals had long since been lost to medieval and Renaissance England, leaving only the outward forms of ritual actions. Rituals evacuated of meaning cannot work, and historically they did not work. (…) Against the backdrop of an England whose rituals had turned from religious to secular to spectacular, and from purgative to political to *pro forma*, *Richard II* performs the 'movement from ceremony and ritual to history'. (85)

MIGHT MAKES RIGHT

As already mentioned, "in preventing the symbolic ritual of chivalry, Richard attacks the source of the only authority that makes him king." (Rackin 79). The divine right of kings is thus not presented in the play as an unquestionable mystical truth that, after Richard's deposition and murder, is infringed through an act of transgression of the natural order of the world that can only be redeemed after a hundred years of bloodshed

[49] The clearest example of this is found in the first canto of Eliot's *The Waste Land* (see p. 207).
[50] In the play's postlapsarian England, blood libations cannot bring regeneration not only because of the vanity of all rituals, but also because they are inseparable from Richard's primal crime, as the blood that soaks the land is the result of kin-killing and civil war, and thus "like sacrificing Abel's, cries / Even from the tongueless caverns of the earth / (…) for justice and rough chastisement" (I.I. 104-106).

and civil war. The divinity of kings, on the contrary, is the credo that underlies the rituals of royalty that, along with other rituals on the play, are aborted and evacuated of meaning. And thus, the divine right of kings is ultimately revealed as a myth. As Holderness notes, the "demi-paradise" that England was in the Golden Age of feudalism was "given cohesion and structure by the central authority of a king bound to his subjects by the reciprocal bounds of fealty" (*Recycled* 64). Such is in fact the purpose of the king in medieval romance and the ideological foundation of the ideal—and thus unreal—social code of chivalry, and as such it is expressed in medieval mythology. The King of the Waste Land is inextricably, mystically connected to the land insofar as the world of romance is mystically ordered through a set of unbreakable "links in a chain" (Kernan 263). In medieval mythology, as God is to man, or the sun to the universe, "so is the king to his subjects" (263); and inevitably, when a disturbance occurred in one of the 'links', "all other parts of the universe trembled sympathetically, and the great equilibrating powers of nature began to react to restore order" (263). The conclusion of all medieval mythology—and specifically of the Waste Land myth as the narrative that articulates the belief in the divine nature of kings—is the restoration of order. But in the history plays, even when their plot dramatizes a process of political restoration, natural and spiritual regeneration is no longer considered possible. Power politics have become irreparably separated from the natural world, and the universe is no longer cosmologically interconnected. Richard II can no longer be a true king in the mythical sense. His dismantling of ritual force and ritual meaning has invalidated his own divinity and mysticism. His connection with the land is no longer sympathetic and spiritual, but exploitative and mercantile. That is why he is bound to rule over the Waste Land; it is also why his sacrificial death can bring no restoration to his kingdom. The mystical connection between the Maimed King and the Waste Land has been annulled, and the King has become a landlord. Gaunt accuses:

> Now he that made me knows *I see the ill*;
> Ill in myself to see, and in thee seeing ill.
> *Thy deathbed is no lesser than thy land,*
> *Wherein though liest in reputation sick*;
> And though, *too careless patient as though art*,
> Committest thy anointed body to the cure
> Of those 'physicians' that first wounded thee.[51]

[51] Gaunt's refers to the king's flatterers, to whom the king has committed his *body*. The later implication that Bushy and Green "have in manner with [their] sinful hours / Made a divorce betwixt his Queen and

(…)
The waste is not whit lesser than thy land.[52]
(…)
Why, cousin, wert thou regent of the world
It were a shame to let this land by lease.
But for thy world enjoying but this land,
Is it not more than shame to shame it so?
Landlord of England art though now, not king. (II.I. 93-99, 103, 109-113, my italics)

Richard is directly and explicitly accused of being sick; once again, as it was already observed in Marlowe's *Edward II*, the irresponsibility of the king is connoted as a sickness by means of a rhetoric that loudly echoes with the remnants of medieval mythology. Richard, as the Maimed King, is not only sick, but lying in his deathbed. His land is *waste*, because he has leased it away; and what is worse, it cannot be restored again, after the Maimed King is killed at the end of the play. The annulment of ritual meaning and of ritual teleology in the play results in the complete and irreversible invalidation of kingship as a divine institution. From this point onwards, the right to the crown will belong to whoever has the *might* to hold the crown.[53] The ideology that underlies the mythology arbitrating the feudal world is then ineluctably subverted. The mysticism of kingship vanishes, as the king himself realizes: "For I have given here my soul's consent / To' undeck the pompous body of a king; / Made glory base, and sovereignty a slave; / Proud majesty, a subject; the state, a peasant" (IV. I. 248-251). In Act III, in a blatantly mythical speech, Richard identifies his own body as an extension of the land to which he is spiritually bound; but in that identification, his body is only

him[=the king]" (III.I. 11-12) suggests, as in the case of Edward II, a bodily fault of the king in terms of sexual inadequacy and the rejection of his sexual reproductive capacity, which, being the king childless, would reinforce the mythical identification with the Maimed King of medieval romance. Hopkins notes: "The sexuality of the monarch is, indeed, something that this play seems careful to avoid, just as the fact that Richard has no child, and hence no heir, is left implicit rather than ever explicitly mentioned. At the same time, though, enough hints are dropped to suggest to the audience that what they are seeing is only part of the picture" (399).

[52] Stanely Wells points out in a footnote that the legal meaning of 'waste'—that is, 'a tenant's destruction of his landlord's property'—is relevant in this context (II.I. 103n). Indeed, Richard's leasing of his kingdom, in mythical terms, has resulted in the land becoming *waste*.

[53] The validity of this hypothesis is demonstrated by means of the representation of royal authority in the latest of Shakespeare's major history plays, through the depiction of King Henry V's political skills to govern and unify Britain. Mack summarizes the depiction of kingship outside the domains of mythology in *Henry V*: "But we need not in any way deny the remarkable picture of a glorious king to recognize that Henry V's way, however admirable in intention and result, is not the way of Gaunt, or, if our glimpses let us judge, of Edward III and the Black Prince. (…) Between these is no difference in vigour—or rather the difference is in Henry's favour—but the difference is in the view of the world in which, and the means with which, vigour operates. The shift is from religion to politics. Proteus makes a glorious king but his throne is further from God" (74).

"that small model of the barren land" (III.II. 153). At this moment in the play, the king and the land are mythically (and explicitly) characterized as barren, because at this moment, Richard is effectively powerless. Holderness explains:

> The only substance of his kingship is now the experience of royal tragedy. The only thing he can bequeath is his own tragic myth: 'sad stories of the deaths of kings'. This speech is a penetrating tragic insight into the hollowness of 'Power' without power—the imagery of hollowness runs from the hollow grave, to the hollow crown, to the 'wall of flesh' encircling the mortal life, which seems as impregnable as a castle, but contains only a vulnerable, isolated life. (*Recycled* 69)

The flesh that covers the king's bones—the king's body natural[54]—is hollow because it is a model of a hollow land, literally a "barren land". King and kingdom are inextricably connected, but only in their hollowness. "The hollowness of 'Power' without power," as Holderness puts it, is the hollowness of myth without meaning; or rather, of a myth without transcendence that is symbolically embodied in the image of the "hollow crown,"

> That rounds the mortal temples of a king
> Keeps death his court; and there the antic sits,
> Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp,
> Allowing him a breath, *a little scene*,
> To monarchize, be feared, and kill with looks,
> Infusing him with self and *vain conceit*,
> As if this flesh which walls about our life
> Were brass impregnable; and humoured thus,
> Comes at the last, and with a little pin
> Bores through his castle wall, and—farewell king! (III.II. 161-170, my italics)

The image of the "hollow crown" symbolizes the mortality of the king and thus the deceit of his divinity; hence the hollowness of the crown is the hollowness of a king whose mythical identity is only created *a posteriori*, only when the king has relinquished power and has become "nothing" (V.V. 38). As Holderness notes, the imagery of divine right creates a kingdom for Richard in which "the whole cosmos is subdued to his power" (*Recycled* 69) only after the king has been made powerless, once the barons' rebellion make conciliation impossible and absolutism impracticable (69). Only then the king animates the earth that he has leased away and rhetorically establishes a mystical inextricable connection between himself and his kingdom through

[54] See previous chapter, p. 42.

a “senseless conjuration” (III.II. 23) after which “this earth shall have a feeling, and these stones // Prove armed soldiers ere her native king” (III.II. 24-25). But such mystical connection between king and kingdom is now the source of mockery. The debasement of feudalism and of the rituals that arbitrated it also denotes the debasement of the land which, now that is governed by a landlord and not a king, possesses “the fluctuating, mediated value of the market” (Rackin 101). Land—the same land that Richard confiscates from Bolingbroke to obtain monetary wealth—is no longer a mark of hereditary status or the uncontended source of aristocratic power; in consequence, the inextricable connection between lord and land that ideologically underlies the Waste Land myth, which coincides with the conjuration invoked by the king upon his return to England, can only be regarded as yet another meaningless travesty.

A MYSTIFYING FICTION

As Rackin explains, “Richard is now associated with the emergent capitalism that was transforming English society in Shakespeare’s own time” (123). Thus the well-known garden allegory in Act III, Rackin argues, “distances the audience from the characters’ medieval time-situation and reminds them that what they are watching is a representation of an exemplary tale, an action completed long ago whose interpretation is not disputable but an established convention” (126). In Hopkins’s terms, “the play itself is, despite its various chivalric trappings and its occasionally archaic feel, *not* medieval” (399). Richard’s story is archetypal and therefore applicable to Shakespeare’s contemporary world; and, consequently, “Gaunt’s ‘demi-paradise’ is projected to a point outside of history. His construction of England as an ‘other Eden’ associates it with that exemplary object of nostalgic yearning, an ideal world that existed in the beginning before the advent of time, change or death” (Racking 123). The idealized past that Gaunt mourns is revealed—in the same way as Richard’s divine nature as monarch—to be exactly that: a myth. In Holderness’s words: “the vivid, radiant vision of a chivalric Eden is a vision of paradise lost, an elegiac lament from an England now betrayed and demoralised. Historical presence exists only in memory: the present is aware rather of immediate absence, since the ‘teeming womb’ of royal kings is already a ‘hollow womb’ that ‘inherits naught but bones’” (*Histories* 186).

The uterine metaphor is appropriate, as it insists on the topic of sterility. It is extended to characterize the queen, in fact, "whose youthful fertility ought to be the medium for protraction of the patriarchal dynasty" (Holderness *Histories* 188), but who instead, as the "hollow womb" of the land that "inherits naught but bones" (II.I. 83), only bears "some unborn sorrow" (II.II. 10) (Holderness *Histories* 189). Hence, through this analogy, the reproductive power of the king is reduced to his ability to engender sorrow in a metaphor of sterility that identifies his barren marriage with the morbid sterility of his kingdom. He is in fact counterpart to the medieval Maimed King, but under Richard's rule, England has become a Waste Land in a deeply symbolic, almost Eliotian sense. Richard's kingdom is not simply identified with a barren land that would stand as the mythical signifier that embodies the state of spiritual degeneration that follows the collapse of feudalism; Richard's Waste Land is a land that actively breeds death, a womb that inherits bones, a ground irrigated with its kinsmen's blood, nourished to grow "dead men's skulls" (IV.I. 144). England is a "cursed earth" (IV.I. 147), like the mythical Waste Land in medieval romance, but even if it has become a mythical space equated with "the field of Golgotha" (IV.I. 144), the sacrificial death of its Christ-like figure cannot atone for the original crime. In fact, the process of mythical reinterpretation in the play is perverse to the extreme; the sacrificial killing of the king—which Richard himself, in a desperate and futile attempt at self-mythologization, identifies with Christ's sacrifice[55]—instead of redeeming the community, actually re-enacts the primal crime committed by Richard, and thus, instead of bringing about any form of spiritual regeneration, only aggravates the state of degeneration that blights England. The play thus enacts a historical crisis that gives account of a state of spiritual destitution—after the rituals of the old order have been corrupted and emptied out of meaning—from which there is no apparent outside.

In his study of biblical analogy in *Richard II*, Stanley Maveety claims that the basic concept in both *Genesis* and Shakespeare's play is "that of a curse visited upon a land and a race of men" (191). Specifically, the curse—as it followed Adam's and, more

[55] "Though some of you—with Pilate—was your hands, / Showing an outward pity, yet you Pilates / Have here delivered me to my sour cross, / And water cannot was away your sins" (IV.I. 238-241). Significantly, the identification between Richard and Christ as sacrificial victims anticipates many of the myth-ritualist reinterpretations of the Waste Land myth that will make use of Christ as a signifier to represent the mythical Fisher King, since from a frazerian perspective, both characters are narrative evolutions of the sacrificial king of vegetation rituals. Instances of this myth-ritualist usage of Christ-like figures will be examined in later chapters.

acutely, Cain's sins—is, by analogy, "the loss of the earth's fertility" (189).[56] It is as such emblematically expressed in the allegory of the garden in Act III, when the Gardener and his men discuss how under the rule of a "wasteful king" (III.IV. 55), the land has suffered a "disordered spring" (III.IV. 48) and thus "is full of weeds, her fairest flowers choked up, / Her fruit trees all unpruned, her hedges ruined, / Her knots disordered, and her wholesome herbs / swarming with caterpillars" (III.IV. 44-47). The king's unfitness to govern is hence identified with his failure to "trim[] and dress[] his land" (III.IV. 56) like a good gardener, which, resuming the biblical analogy, would give account, once again, of a *second* fall: the king's inability to tend to his land signifies his failure at completing Adam's task of toiling the land to earn its fruit. Likewise, the fact that Richard's queen only bears in her womb "some unborn sorrow" (II.II. 10) seems to exacerbate Eve's original punishment to bring children "in sorrow" (*KJB*, Gen. 3.16). In this regard, the wasting of Richard's kingdom seems more terrible and more irreversible than God's original punishment of Adam; once again, Richard is more accurately identified with Cain and with his punishment to wander a land that will *never* bear fruit.

As already explained, Richard's allegedly sacrificial killing cannot redeem the curse fallen upon the land, because by the time he self-identifies with Christ, the king's self-mythologization is revealed as a fictive fabrication, only construed after the king has lost all of his power. Divine right emerges then as "a mystifying fiction" (Holderness *Recycled* 70), and the myths of monarchy are dramatized only as monarchy dissolves (71). Explicitly, "myth becomes a power ideology" (71) in front of the audience, and its alleged transcendence is erased. For as Eagleton argued, *Richard II* expresses how "myth and metaphor (…) are not purely supplementary to [society], mere disposable ornaments, since they shape from within the history to which they give outward expression" (12). Such is, in fact, the contemporary relevance of the play at the age of Shakespeare.

The doctrine of the king's two bodies was a dominant discourse in Shakespeare's England; as Reese notes, "the king-subject relationship was universally felt to be a given relationship, plainly comfortable with Nature, like the father-child relationship within the family. No other political arrangement was conceivable, and Elizabethan

[56] After the original sin, Adam is cursed to toil the land to earn its fruit, after God's sentence that "cursed *is* the ground for [his] sake" (*KJB*, Gen. 3.17). As already mentioned, Cain's retribution after he murders his brother is that "the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength" (*KJB*, Gen. 4.12). Inevitably, in mythical terms, the land's sterility is inextricable from a failure in fecundity, as the loss of the soil's overabundant fertility after Adam's sin mirrors Eve's punishment to "in sorrow (…) bring forth children" (*KJB*, Gen. 3.16).

England was as queen-centred as a hive" (112). But within this ideological framework, taking into consideration the "theories of deposition" that flourished simultaneously during the 1590s (Knowles 64), the officially-sanctioned doctrine of the king's two bodies—the dialectics of mortal and immortal, human and divine, unified in the mystical figure of the king—has often been argued to actually express a whole theory of representation at the time, which in fact "sought to establish a natural unity of sign and thing signified" (Norbrook 329). But as such unity was becoming difficult to sustain, through plays like *Richard II* its breakdown was projected into a parallel time of transition in the medieval past. In this view, Shakespeare's play would dramatize "the tragic consequences of the breakdown of political and, more broadly, of semiotic unity" (329), as "it brought together the official doctrine of the sanctity of kingship and the circumstances by which a king might be deposed and another elected, the very situation by the 1590s as a result of decades of developing resistance theory from every direction at home and abroad" (Knowles 64).[57]

This hypothesis is inseparable from the breakdown of ritual and its meaning in Shakespeare's play, as the recurrent breakdown of ritual throughout the text determines that "the violent uncrowning of the royal martyr or royal villain is invariably accompanied by a more generalized, pervasive social violence or civil war" (Bristol 197-198). And, as in Marlowe's *Edward II*, the restoration of order through the (apparently) ritualistic regicide cannot be extricated from the social violence that surrounds the act, so that Bolingbroke's rebellion and killing of Richard cannot operate, mythically, as a cure for the land's disease. On the contrary, rebellion, as in the previously examined play by Marlowe, is "the diseased product of a diseased condition" (Reese 230) that irreparably afflicts the whole land. The Tudor myth then, even when identified by critics as featuring in the histories as dramatic strategy to legitimize the historical violence that led to the Tudor installation and regime, cannot be claimed to operate as the *uncontested* strategy of legitimization of the Tudor claim. Onstage, myth, like ritual, is simultaneously enacted and evacuated of all transcendental meaning. It is revealed as a fiction, a travesty parallel to the recurrent meaningless rituals that when enacted are either aborted or inverted. After the last wholly legitimate king of England leases out the land and is represented on the stage as a mere landlord, the kingdom is only bound together—and, perhaps more meaningfully, only bound to the king's royal

[57] See note 15 in the previous chapter, p. 44.

authority—"with inky blots and rotten parchments bonds" (II.I. 64). As Eagleton notes, "the social order [in Richard's England] is stitched together by empty words" (12): the "empty words" of emptied-out mythology. By that token, the same claim can be made about Shakespeare's England, in which social order is only flimsy and rather unstably bound by the 'empty words' of the so-called Tudor myth.

Such are the "intimations in Shakespeare of a release from the complex narrative orders in which everyone is inscribed" (Greenblatt *Self-Fashioning* 254): the "*submission*" (254) to the Tudor vision of unity, "whose downright violence undermines everything it was meant to shore up" (254). The result is the exposure of such unitary vision as an "anxious rhetorical attempt […] to conceal cracks, conflict and disarray" (Greenblatt *Negotiations* 2). As traditionally assessed, the dominant ideology of the Tudor regime is articulated, historically, through the Tudor myth: a myth of political restoration that equates political order with natural and preternatural order, and with spiritual regeneration. Arguably, such a myth can be interpreted as a variant of the Waste Land myth, the updated and topically relevant retelling of the Maimed King's death and subsequent restoration of the Waste Land under the rule of a strong successor, who completed the ritualistic killing of the king. But the myth is reinterpreted once it is reutilized to dramatize the events leading up to the death of Richard II's in a way that blatantly represents the hope for regeneration as a "mystifying fiction" (Holderness *Recycled* 70) in which the once inextricable and unified relationship of identity between signifier and signified—i.e, between myth and 'true meaning', between divine king and providential governance—is at last represented as a broken down, easily deconstructed, ideological construct:

> Cover your heads, and mock not flesh and blood
> With solemn reverence. Throw away respect,
> Tradition, form, and ceremonious duty;
> For you have but mistook me all this while.
> I live with bread, like you; feel want,
> Taste grief, need friends. Subjected thus,
> How can you say to me I am a king? (III.ii. 171-177).

CHAPTER 3

THE END OF ROMANCE:
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *THE TEMPEST*

THE MODE OF ROMANCE

In the middle ages, English romances emerged at a time when its French counterparts—which worked as their model and source—had already diversified widely from its so-called classic form, that is, Chrétien de Troyes's twelfth-century works (Barron 57), which, as explained in the introduction to this study, contain the earliest extant version of the Waste Land myth. Such diversification of French romances inevitably brought about a broadening of the genre, which came to include (besides the 'classic' romances of chivalry) the chronicles, saints' lives, allegorical dream-visions, and lyric verses (Barron 57). Such variety would seem to substantiate Corinne Saunders's assessment of romance as a literary form that essentially "speaks of timeless moments" (Saunders 1) and is thus "imagistic" and "trans-historical" (1). Across the centuries romances have woven the widely varied stories of Camelot, Troy, or the Celtic otherworld, and its recurrent motifs—the quest, the test, etc.—have been assessed as the "foundation stones of literature" (Saunders 1). But as Saunders also notes, such pervasiveness of romance throughout literary history, along with the inherent diversity of topics described by Barron, have determined that "the *genre* of romance is impossible adequately to define" (Saunders 1-2). Most critics agree on this view and thus have opted throughout the

decades to follow Northrop Frye's suggestion that romance should not be regarded as a genre, but rather as the literary *mode* that "leads from a state of order through darkness, winter, and death, to rebirth, new order, and maturity" (Saunders 3). Romance is therefore circumscribed by its theme—regeneration—rather than its form. This notion, in fact, has traditionally justified the generic categorization of Shakespeare last plays as 'romances,' as it has been claimed that the plots of these 'last plays' actually dramatize the ideological movement of romance towards regeneration.

As Michael Hays argues, one of the forces blurring the dividing line between medieval and early-modern literature in the English tradition is precisely the pervasiveness of the romance of chivalry in the Renaissance, evolved from its classic form into a kind of "hybrid romance" that is primarily focused on "emotional states and social conduct" (par. 13). These emotionally and socially focused romances, Hays argues, structure the plot of the "miraculous romances" (par. 13) that Shakespeare wrote during James I's reign. By that time, the literary influence of romance was deep, but also very intricate, for, confirming Barron's elucidation of the romance tradition, "romance literature was a diverse and complex stream of verse and prose, the product of five changing centuries and of half a dozen European countries of varying culture and civilisation" (Pettet 12). Yet there are several traits common to Shakespeare's last plays—and to all forms of romance—that have helped to identify them generically as romances, namely: they are "courtly and aristocratic" (Pettet 168); "all is ordered by a positive, controlled, and altogether benign temper and shaped to a pattern of ideal poetic justice" (169); they are characterized by a "mass of incident" and a "vigour and excitement of narrative" (163), and also by the recurrence of romance conventions such as "all-deceptive disguises and mistaken identities" and "dreams and touches of the supernatural" (164). In the case of Shakespeare's last play, *The Tempest* (ca. 1610), examined in this chapter, the identification of the text with the literary mode of romance seems unequivocal when regarded from Tillyard's interpretation of its core meaning. In *The Tempest*, he argues:

> The main character is a King. At the beginning he is in prosperity. He then does an evil or misguided deed. Great suffering follows, but during this suffering or at its height the seeds of something new to issue from it are germinating, usually in secret. In the end this new element assimilates and transforms the old evil. The King overcomes his evil instincts, joins himself to the new order by an act of forgiveness or repentance; and the play issues into a fairer prosperity than had at first existed. (*Last Plays* 191)

Indubitably, the fall-and-redemption narrative traced by Tillyard in *The Tempest* is reminiscent of the already explored ritualistic and romance-like structure of the chronicle material that both Marlowe and Shakespeare recover and adapt in their history plays. This characterization of romance seems to validate the argument that Tudor historiography in fact "emplots" historical events in order to fit a specific kind of plot structure (White 83), in this case, as argued, the plot structure of the romances, which operate as the culturally provided category employed to articulate and make sense of History.[58] But apparently the case of *The Tempest* is different from the dramatization of romance explored in the history plays already examined, as the romance conventions that may be traced in the play are not mediated through historiography, but presented straightforwardly as a 'true' romance. Following Tillyard's explanation, *The Tempest* enacts, in essence, the mythical return to the Garden of Eden, or, in terms pertaining specifically to the medieval romance of chivalry, the spiritual rather than physical restoration of the mythical Waste Land. Such is not only the alleged core meaning of Shakespeare's last play, but supposedly of *all* romances. Kermode explains:

> [Romance] thrives upon the myth of the indefeasible magnanimity of royal children as it does upon the myth of the magical connexion between the fertility of the king and of his lands and subjects. Hence it is the only atmosphere in which extended consideration may plausibly be given to such explorations of nature as Shakespeare attempted in the group of plays known as the romances; for in actuality the issue is always obscured, but in art the ideas can develop as it were of themselves, with ideal clarity, as if to show us that a formal and ordered paradigm of these forces is possible when life is purged of accident. ("Introduction" LVI).

The exploration of nature in *The Tempest* is thus the exploration of the mystical natural world found in romance, inextricably (and sympathetically) connected to the divine king of romance mythology and interdependent on the inherent (and divine-like) goodness of the royal children who guarantee succession and thus the preservation of political (and natural) order. Traditionally, such has been not only the most common interpretation of the play, but, as mentioned, such reading has justified the classification of *The Tempest* as a romance, since its mythological meaning seems to be coincidental with the core meaning of the romance mode. Yet, the notion of romance as narrating,

[58] See p. 37.

mythically, a cyclical return to the Garden of Eden, even though it has been rather convenient to circumscribe the limits of the genre, has also lead to certain misunderstandings of a few highly-sophisticated romances throughout the literary tradition which, as Saunders notes, "are characterized by irony, parody, self-consciousness, and comedy—and sometimes by a sense of deep failure and loss" (3). As this chapter will argue, such is the case of *The Tempest*.

According to Northrop Frye, "the complete form of the romance is clearly the successful quest, and such a completed form has three main stages: (…) the *agon* or conflict, the *pathos* or death-struggle, and the *anagnorisis* or discovery, the recognition of the hero (…) Thus the romance expresses more clearly the passage from struggle through a point of ritual death to a recognition scene that we discovered in comedy" (*Anatomy* 187). At first glance, such a pattern—the archetypal narrative of a successful quest, which characterizes the medieval variant of the Waste Land myth—can be identified with Ferdinand's journey in *The Tempest*, as he, before consummating his love with Miranda—and hence being able to succeed Prospero as king—must accomplish a series of tasks typically found in romances of chivalry. Alvin Kernan summarizes: "[Ferdinand] is first taught human helplessness by being frozen with his sword uplifted. Next he is put to the humiliating work of dragging in heavy logs in order that he may understand the hard manual labour necessary to keep the fires of the world burning, and the fact that the full enjoyment of anything requires that it be earned" (467-468). Only after he has completed his tasks and has endured labours and tests can Ferdinand join Miranda in the (chaste, courtly) marriage that will bring about political restoration to Prospero's unruly state. Subsequently, this re-estabilising of political order, insofar as it is legitimate and qualified, for Ferdinand has proven his chivalric worth, must also result, mythically, in the natural and spiritual collective regeneration that constitutes "[the] embodiment of the romance ideal" (Hillman 148). In this view, *The Tempest* indeed presents a "complete romance pattern" (145) that may actually be traced to its sources.

THE TEMPEST, *FAIR SIDEA*, *PERCEVAL* AND THE MYTH OF RISHYASRINGA

From the beginning of the twentieth century, Shakespeare criticism has noted similarities between *The Tempest* and the German play *Fair Sidea*, by Jacob Ayrer. Ayrer's play, which was not printed until 1618, could not have been a direct source for Shakespeare's romance, but the striking similarities in the plot of both plays point towards a common source which, in 1903, W.W. Newell described as,

> the most widely diffused and popular of all folk-tales, that in which an unfortunate youth makes in the wilderness the acquaintance of a fairy, over whom he obtains power by seizing the feather robe which enables her to soar, [and] is guided to the house of her gigantic father, where she protects him from the cannibal, is required to perform difficult tasks accomplished through her magic, ultimately elopes with her and is pursued, but again saved by her advice. (Newell 240)

Newell's claim about a common source found in folklore is pertinent, as it is cognate with the hypotheses advanced by myth-ritualist critics at the beginning of the twentieth century.[59] Among these critics, Colin Still stands out on account of his book *Shakespeare's Mystery Play: A Study of the Tempest* (1921), in which he argued that "the inner theme of the Play is one which is expressed in countless works of art and literature, in ancient myth and popular tradition, and in all authentic initiation rites" (13).[60] As briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, such is in fact the basic claim of myth-ritualism as a school of thought: all myths (and, extensively, all folk-tales) are the successive variations of a primeval myth, which was, *ab origine*, the narrative evolution and/or explanation of a ritual. This ritual, be it an initiation rite or a sacrificial death, was ultimately a ritual of communal regeneration, and thus romance is understood, in this view, as the literary mode containing the myths that articulate a social need for restoration and renewal, originally arbitrated through ritual. By extension, all romances

[59] See p. 16.

[60] This argument, made famous by Still's book in 1921, arguably accounts for the intertextual relationship between T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) and Shakespeare's last play, as it will be explained in chapter 3.1. Critic Ronald Tamplin goes as far as arguing that Still's study of *The Tempest* is one of the major sources of Eliot's poem, in so far as "it directs and extends material from Weston and Frazer and ensures that the patterns in the poem deriving from comparative religion ascend rather than coalesce, move rather than mark time" (352). Even though this study does not subscribe the hypothesis that the poetic movement of *The Waste Land* (or the dramatic movement of *The Tempest*, for that matter) is a movement of *ascension*, Tamplin's essay certifies the relevance of a myth-critical study of *The Tempest* in order to explore the representation of the Waste Land myth in Anglo-American literary tradition. As Williams notes, "*The Tempest* is the most prominent Renaissance drama in *The Waste Land*, and perhaps the most Frazerian as well" (par. 22).

should be regarded, intrinsically, as variations on a theme, and so it becomes relevant that one of the versions of "the most widely diffused and popular of all folk-tales" (Newell 240) that Newell established as the common source for *The Tempest* and *Fair Sidea* is, in fact, the Hindu-Buddhist myth of Rishyasringa.

In the key text of myth-ritualism, Jessie Weston's already mentioned *From Ritual to Romance* (1920), the myth of Rishyasringa is included as one of the variants of the original myth that eventually developed into the legend of the Grail in Arthurian romance.[61] From a myth-ritualist view, *The Tempest*, *Fair Sidea* and the Waste Land myth, or even more specifically, *The Tempest*, *Fair Sidea* and Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval*, are argued to be variant versions of the same original myth, along with the Hindu-Buddhist myth of Rishyasringa that Weston includes in her study. As in *The Tempest*, the story of Rishyasringa is founded on the mythical presupposition that the ceremonial marriage of royal children constitutes a *fertility ritual* that, in order to be successful in bringing on regeneration, must strictly observe the rule of chastity. As Weston describes it, Rishyasringa must remain chaste at all costs, so that once the marriage is consummated the rain shall fall upon the rainless land (31); in *The Tempest*, Miranda's virginity must also be preserved so that political (and thus natural) restoration is made possible. Ferdinand pleads as he sees her for the first time:

> …"Vouchsafe my prayer
> May know if you remain upon this island,
> And that you will some good instruction give
> How I may bear me here. *My prime request*,
> Which I do last pronounce, is (O you wonder!)
> If you be maid or no? (Shakespeare I.II. 420-425, my italics)

Miranda promises him immediately: "I am your wife if you'll marry me; If not, I'll die your maid" (II.II. 83-84). Chastity is in this way accordingly protected, while Ferdinand endures his penitent tasks under Prospero's design and command. Finally satisfied, the seemingly all-powerful king Prospero gives away his daughter to his enemy's son:

> Then, as my gift, and thine own acquisition
> Worthily purchased, take my daughter. But

[61] For a brief explanation of Weston's influence in the literary history of the Waste Land myth, see the introduction, pp. 16-19.

If though dost break her virgin-knot before
All sanctimonious ceremonies may
With full and holy rite be ministered,
No sweet aspersion shall the heavens let fall
To make this contract grow; but barren hate,
Sour eyed disdain, and discord shall bestrew
The union of your bed, with weeds so loathly
That you shall hate it both. Therefore take heed,
As Hymen's lamps shall light you. (IV.I. 12-24, my italics)

In Prospero's words, the necessity of completing the marriage ceremonies so all rites are fully and holy ministered is made explicit, thus relating the noble (political) marriage between Ferdinand and Miranda, and the natural ("No sweet aspersion shall the heavens let fall") and spiritual restoration that should be brought about by their union. Political restoration and natural regeneration, as they pertain to romance ideology, are inextricably equated; however, the regenerative betrothal of the royal children is not executed through a ritual, but celebrated with a *masque*. The masque *represents* the ritual but, consequently, it also *replaces* ritual. *The Tempest*, after all, takes place in the same world without ritual that is dramatically represented in *Richard II*. This time, even more explicitly, the world artificially recreated on the stage is a "bare island" (Epilogue 8), a mythical Waste Land, as it will be explained, with no hopes of restoration; a world in which all rituals have lost their mystic force and thus have become a mere travesty, the outward form of which is emptied out of meaning.

AN IMAGE OF RITUAL

In the masque that represents the fertility ritual (which stands as the core meaning of the romance), the union of Ferdinand and Miranda is eloquently not blessed by Venus or Cupid, but by Ceres and Juno, the goddesses of fertility and fecundity, who bless the betrothed with "earth's increase," "foison plenty," never-empty barns and garners, growing vines, bowing plants and a winterless existence (IV.I. 110-115). As in the myth of Rishyasringa, the chivalric plot of Ferdinand's ordeal and his (courtly) love for Miranda concludes with the enactment of a vegetation rite meant to ensure the restoration of the land's fertility. The reestablishment of political order—after the chain of usurpations enacted and narrated throughout the play—is unambiguously equated

with the subsequent regeneration of the natural world, and thus *The Tempest*, apparently a true romance, seems to support the hypothesis that the fundamental subject matter of romance is in fact "the victory of fertility over the waste land" (Frye *Anatomy* 193). Juno's blessing seems to ensure the fecundity of Ferdinand and Miranda's marriage, and, in mythical terms, such fecundity is inextricable from the fertility of the land that Ceres blesses; it does not come as a surprise, then, that Northrop Frye straightforwardly claimed that, in Shakespeare's play, "the masque has about it the freshness of Noah's new world, after the tempest had receded and the rainbow promised that seedtime and harvest should not cease" (Frye "Introduction" 63).

The marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda crystallizes the political reconciliation between Prospero and those who usurped his power, effectively bringing about the restoration of political order. In Tillyard's words, "not only do Ferdinand and Miranda sustain Prospero in representing a new order of things that has evolved out of destruction; they also vouch for its continuation. At the end of the play Alonso and Prospero are old and worn men. A younger and happier generation is needed to secure the new state" (*Last Plays* 58). By lawfully inheriting Prospero's role, Ferdinand is completing the narrative pattern of the Waste Land myth: Ferdinand's successful completion of Prospero's tasks constitutes his successful completion of the chivalric quest, because as Frye notes, "the replacement of an aged and impotent king by a youthful successor is really a displacement of the theme of renewing the old king's youth" (*Secular* 121) in a mythical context in which "the fertility of the land and the virility of the king who rules it have an ancient sexual magical connection" (121).[62] Indeed, the restoration of the Waste Land that Prospero governed as "an impotent intellectual on a desert island" (Girard 349) is apparently brought about by Ferdinand's chivalric success but, unfortunately, such an achievement is limited to the confinements of Prospero's dramatic design. As mentioned, the fertility masque is not a ritual, but the dramatic representation of a ritual that has been premeditated by Prospero; for as Hillman notes, it is Prospero himself who deliberately presents his own history "in terms of the typical movement from exclusion to deliverance" (145).

Only within Prospero's account of his own personal history, he is a true mystical king, even if aging and usurped of his legitimate authority. As Coby realizes, in

[62] As described in the previous chapters, the displacement of the Maimed King's healing into a process of royal succession, by means of which the mystical spirit of the divine king is transferred onto a more vigorous successor so that the Waste Land is restored was already established in late medieval versions of the Waste Land myth, and as such it was represented in the history plays. See, e.g., p. 44.

Prospero's version of the story, he claims that after he was usurped of his power, "his city suffered an 'ignoble stooping' before Naples (annual tribute, homage, subjection of coronet to crown) that it had not formerly known" (219). Yet Prospero had been a negligent duke of Milan, only to become "the consummate political man" (219) as soon as he arrives on the island. One may suspect irony in this quasi-mythical transformation from an unfit philosopher king into a seemingly almighty and practically divine monarch. After all, Prospero becomes a true capable politician only when he is governing over a *desert* island, and the only native—and subject—that Prospero encounters, Caliban, remains rebellious, ungovernable and ultimately out of Prospero's control all throughout the play. It may be then argued, as recent criticism has claimed, that in truth Prospero is a powerless king, and his only capacity is the art to fabricate a romance of restoration by means of which he is able to retell his own history. From this perspective, it seems that the uses of romance in *The Tempest* are not completely different from the uses of romance already explored in the history plays; in both cases, romance operates as the *icon* or *mythos* (White 88) that structures the events of a pseudo-historical narrative, and is ultimately revealed as a fabrication to set in order a chaotic reality in which spiritual collective redemption is no longer possible.

Frank Kermode defines romance as "a mode of exhibiting the action of magical and moral laws in a version of human life so selective as to obscure, for the special purpose of concentrating attention on these laws, the fact that in reality their force is intermittent and only fitfully glimpsed" ("Introduction" LIV). Such is the functionality of romance in *The Tempest*, as it can be inferred by the culmination of Prospero's work; that is, by the masque that (*representationally*) ties in the royal marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda with the vegetation ritual arguably that underlies the meaning of romance as narrating what was in origin a ritual meant to restore the fertility of the land. In this regard, a "magical and moral law" evidently binds nature rituals to the established political order; yet, as new-historicist criticism on *The Tempest* has demonstrated to be rather obvious (Barker and Hulme; Hulme), the masque in Shakespeare's play replaces and thus effaces nature rituals.

Prospero characterizes the masque openly as a "vanity" (IV.I. 41). It is an *image* of ritual, not yet a simulacrum as defined by Baudrillard (as a representation bearing no relation to any reality whatsoever), but an image occupying a prior stage in the evolution of representation. As a "baseless fabric" (IV.I. 152), the masque is an image

that conceals "the absence of a profound reality" (Baudrillard 6).[63] There is no ritual of regeneration executed through the performance; there is only the theatrical performance. In the epilogue that closes the play, the island remains as "bare" (Epilogue 8) as it was ever "most desolate" (III.III. 80), but as John Dover Wilson recognized in his classical interpretation of the play, "the words 'bare island' (…) can only mean the stage on which [Prospero] stands and from which he craves his dismissal by applause" (5). If the island remains bare at the end, that is, if the mythical Waste Land has not been restored, the reason for the lack of regeneration is then to be found in the *theatricality* and unreality of the romance onstage.

At the end of *The Tempest*, the romance has concluded and the noble marriage that allegedly will bring on forgiveness, redemption and political stability has been celebrated; but the Waste Land has not been restored. The masque, the image of the ritual, was after all interrupted by Prospero himself, who by his own actions—not unlike Richard II when he interrupts the trial by combat between Mowbray and Bolingbroke—makes manifest the annihilation of the ritualistic force that may have been contained in the enactment of the vegetation ritual. The absolute negation of any teleological purpose in the masque brings attention towards its vanity, and so by means of Prospero's interruption, the ritual is disclosed as an emptied-out performance. This action in fact constitutes a revelation very similar to the representation of frustrated and aborted rituals in *Richard II*: the masque is but a vision with a "baseless fabric" (IV.I. 152), and so the life which is meant to be reactivated through ritual, rather than finding renewal, dissolves and withers away without any hope of regeneration:

> Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
> As I foretold you, were all spirits and
> Are melted into air, into thin air:
> And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
> The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Ye all which it inherit, shall dissolve
> And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind. (IV.I. 148-156).

[63] If the overtly postmodern interpretation of the masque seems too jarring, perhaps it bears recalling Tillyard's now classic commentary that "when we examine the masque, we find that, through its function may be simple, the means by which it is presented are complicated in a manner we associate rather with Pirandello than with the Elizabethan drama. On the actual stage the masque is executed by players pretending to be spirits, pretending to be real actors, pretending to be supposed goddesses and rustics." (80) Of course, it also bears questioning why, when recognizing that the presentation of the masque is extremely complicated, Tillyard would also argue that its function was contrarily "simple."

As Zimbardo explains, “the masque which has been the jumping-off place for so many of the theories that would describe the play as a fertility celebration, is, we are told by Prospero, only [an] enactment” (55) and so, it follows, “the theme of *The Tempest* is not regeneration through suffering, but the eternal conflict between order and chaos, the attempt of art to impose form upon the formless and chaotic, and the limitations of art in this endeavour” (50). Prospero’s fabrication and dramatization of a romance of regeneration attempts to make life conform to the “magical and moral laws” (Kermode “Introduction” LIV) of mythology, but whatever form of order he achieves can only be as transient and fragile as the theatrically conjured up by nymphs and reapers that “heavily vanish” (IV.I.) as soon as Prospero loses concentration in his efforts as stage manager. As Barker and Hulme have noticed, the interruption of the masque and its resulting revelation as a vanity are the key to untangling the network of discourses that “mark and fissure” the play (197), and untangling such discursive network is the strategy employed so as to analyze *The Tempest* as a “historical utterance” (194).

THE PLAY WITHIN THE PLAY

On the basis that, as Marshall states, the world of the play “is no utopia, with novel government and alien peoples distant from the experience of the citizens of James VI and I’s kingdoms (…) [but] the type of less than perfect state that was all around Shakespeare when he wrote the play” (388), Barker and Hulme argue that *The Tempest* enacts “[the] anxiety concerning the very matters of domination and resistance” (198) around a series of interweaving plots that revolve around recurrent acts of usurpation of royal authority. According to this argument, Antonio usurps Prospero’s dukedom of Milan and, later, after Prospero’s self-installation as ruler of the island—which is, evidently, another blatant act of usurpation—the latter is suddenly empowered with the (discursive) authority to annihilate the affront originally committed against him. In order to do that, Prospero designs a romance of restoration and stages his design in order to dramatically—and, hopefully, ritually—re-conquer his own usurped political power. As Peter Hulme explains it:

> The traditional identification of Prospero with Shakespeare, though spurious, half grasps the crucial point that Prospero, like Shakespeare, is a dramatist and creator of theatrical effects. The analogies between the play he stages and *The Tempest* are close and important (…). Prospero's play is, at root, a project whose outcome depends upon his skill at presentation, its ultimate purpose being to manoeuvre Alonso physically and psychologically in such a way that the revelation of his son's seemingly miraculous return from the dead will be so bound up with Ferdinand's love for Miranda that Alonso will be in no position to oppose the union that guarantees the security of Prospero's Milanese dukedom, at least during the remainder of Prospero's lifetime. (Hulme 233)

The argument that *The Tempest* enacts a play within a play has been traditionally established, and even critics such as Nortrhop Frye have argued that "in *The Tempest* the play and the play within the play have become the same thing: we're looking simultaneously at two plays, Shakespeare's and the dramatic structure being worked out by Prospero" (*On Shakespeare* 172). However, the new-historicist argument about the two plays of *The Tempest* reassesses this traditional view by refusing to identify Prospero's play with *The Tempest*, hypothesizing on the contrary that there are two dramatic levels in the text; that is, that Prospero's play—a comedy of restoration (Barker and Hulme 198)—is contained within the dramatic universe of *The Tempest* (Hulme 233) in a way that ineluctably emphasizes the fictiveness of this 'play-within-a-play'. From this perspective, the ideological purpose of Prospero's play is more evidently inferred, as it is easily observed how, within the dramatic world of *The Tempest*, Prospero designs, stages and controls the characters' actions and reactions as a priest conducting a rite, in this case meant to efface the actions that usurped Prospero of his power.

As Stephen Orgel has noted, the actual result of Prospero's re-conquest of his political power is the reduction of Milan to a Neapolitan fiefdom through the marriage of Miranda and Ferdinand; so in fact Prospero is recouping his dukedom through *his* play only to immediately give it away, arguably then with only the intention of usurping his brother's power. Prospero's endgame is thus the restoration of order, but not so much through the installation of a new order by means of a legitimate political succession, but through the annihilation of the original affront committed against him. Such an effect is obtained by what Hulme points out as "a series of repetitions" (238), a circumstance that actually seems to reinforce the interpretation of Prospero's play as an intended (but failed) ritual of regeneration and royal restoration. Bloch explains:

> A least some, if not most, of the actions involved in [rituals] are understood, by actors and observers alike, as repetitions; that is, they are acts, whether speech acts or acts of another kind, that do not completely originate in the intentionality of the producer at the time of his or her performance (...) It means that what is involved in ritual is conscious 'repetition,' either of oneself, but much more often and much more importantly, of others whom one has seen or heard perform the ritual before. All rituals thus involve what can be called 'quotation,' if we use the term to refer not just to language, but to all repetitions of originators. (68)

Prospero's play, which insofar as it manages to modify the political status quo might be interpreted as a successful rite of restoration, is indeed performed through a series of repetitions. Caliban's plot against Prospero repeats Antonio's usurpation, but this time Prospero is in control of the actions carried out by the characters: as he has schemed it, he will discover Caliban's plot in time and he will repress Caliban's rebellion so that, effectively, "repetition cancels out the original" (Hulme 238). By means of his (intended-as-ritual) play, Prospero aims to undo the damage he has suffered; but in order to do so he needs to reconfigure Caliban's role into embodying not only Antonio, but also Prospero himself. Because outside of the limits of the dramatic action controlled by Prospero, that is, in the initial dramatic level occupied by *The Tempest*, Caliban is not repeating Antonio's—and, by extension, Prospero's—actions as usurpers. On the contrary, in *The Tempest*, Caliban is the victim of Prospero's act of usurpation upon the island:

> This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother,
> Which thou tak'st from me. When thou cam'st first
> Thou strok'st me and madest much of me; wouldst give me
> Water with berries in't, and teach me how
> To name the bigger light, and how the less,
> That burn by day and night. And then I loved thee
> And showed thee all the qualities o' th' isle,
> The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile.
> Cursed be I that did so! All the charms
> Of Sycorax—toads, beetles, bats— light on you!
> For I am all the subjects that you have,
> Which first was mine own king. (I.II. 331-342)

As a usurper, Prospero cannot restore his legitimate royal authority as he intends to do, unless he undoes first his own act of usurpation. Thus, in order to legitimize his authority over Caliban and the island, Prospero—in possession of the narrative authority

which he has claimed as both colonizer and playwright/stage manager—fabricates a (typically colonialist) narrative of treachery to retell the history of his relationship with Caliban. He counter-argues Caliban's accusations of usurpation by accusing him:

> Thou most lying slave,
> Whom stripes may move, not kindness. I have used thee
> (Filth as though art) with humane care, and lodged thee
> In mine own cell till thou didst seek to violate
> The honor of my child. (I.II. 344-348).[64]

The narrative of treachery that Prospero fabricates, as Hulme argues, has the effect of effacing the original relationship between Caliban and Prospero, as host and guest, by inscribing Caliban into the role of a rebellious slave (Hulme 246-247). Simultaneously, this re-characterization of Caliban serves to identify him as Antonio's doppelganger in the re-enactment of the original act of usurpation committed against Prospero, and thus Prospero's play manages to obliterate both, the crime committed against him and the crime Prospero himself commits, so that redemption is (apparently) made possible. Antonio's usurpation of Prospero's dukedom is undone by means of a repetition—that is, an *image* of the original action—that cancels out the original transgression; meanwhile, Prospero's usurpation upon the island is effaced and rewritten into a whole new (authoritative) narrative of treachery. As a result, Prospero's control over Caliban's conspiracy—which, as a dramatic plot, validates Caliban's identification with a rebellious slave and re-enacts Antonio's usurpation—cannot but legitimize Prospero's authority as the rightful, almighty king figure that he designs himself to be. As Greenblatt explains, "a crisis of authority—deposition from power, exile, *impotence*—gives way through the power of [Prospero's] art to a full restoration. From this perspective Prospero's magic is the romance equivalent of martial law" (156, my italics). Prospero's art is the romance equivalent to martial law because, by means of the re-appropriation of the literary conventions of romance, Prospero's play mirrors the from-Waste-Land-to-Eden pattern of romance mythology. From a situation of

[64] Caliban's response to Prospero's accusation that "Would't had been done! / Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else / This isle with Calibans" (I.II. 348-350) conveys a sense of generative sexuality that seems to stress Prospero's barrenness as "an impotent intellectual on a desert island" (Girard 349). This allusion certainly conditions Prospero's characterization as a very particular kind of divine king: a *sterile* divine king. As it will be explained further on, this contrast between the youthful reproductive capacity of Caliban and the aged impotence of Prospero is paralleled by Prospero's dependency on Caliban to obtain sustenance from a (waste) land that, even though it appears to be controlled by Prospero's seemingly supernatural powers, will not yield him fruit.

impotence and powerlessness, such as it may characterize the plight of the Maimed King in the medieval myth, the dramatic actions controlled by Prospero give way to a full restoration of the political order disrupted when the king's power is usurped in a way that makes *The Tempest* truly resemble the history plays. Wilson Knight went as far as arguing that "as a sovereign wrongfully dethroned [Prospero] carries the overtones of tragic royalty enjoyed by Richard II" (204-205). Unquestionably, the issue of whether Richard II and Prospero are wrongly or rightfully dethroned defies such a straightforward categorization, but it is no less true that, as Wilders argues, "Prospero's attempts to control his subjects, both those native to the island and the arrivals from Milan, are a symbolic representation of the kind of specific problems faced by the rulers and statesmen of Shakespeare's history plays" (127). Wilders elaborates:

> Like [the rulers of Shakespeare's history plays Prospero] is subjected to fortune and to time, like them he is both a usurper (of Caliban's kingdom) and the victim of usurpation (by Antonio); he struggles to put down the mutinies first of Antonio then of Caliban and his disorderly companions, and in spite of his extraordinary, supernatural powers he cannot exact the voluntary submission of all his subjects: Antonio, his treacherous and usurping brother, makes no response to his offer of forgiveness. Prospero's laborious struggle to restore the political *status quo* is only a partial success and the enigmatic silence of Antonio seems to remove any certainty that rebellion will not again break out. (127-128).

As mentioned, Prospero's play only manages to restore order temporarily and superficially. That explains, in Hulme's view (248), Prospero's anxious and deeply disturbed reaction to forgetting his own 'work', which results in the interruption of the masque and determines that Prospero's revels stop and fade when he is proven incapable of maintaining control over his own design:

> *Enter certain reapers, properly habited. They join with the nymphs in a graceful dance, towards the end of whereof* PROSPERO *starts suddenly and speaks, after which, to a strange, hollow, and confused noise, they heavily vanish.*
> PROSPERO
> I had forgot that foul conspiracy
> Of the beast Caliban and his confederates
> Against my life. The minute of their plot
> Is almost come. (IV. I. 139-142)

For Prospero, forgetting Caliban's plot against him entails the surrender of his power as author *and* legitimate king; it means the failure to erase his own downfall as

Duke of Milan, and it means relinquishing his claim of legitimate authority over the island. As he loses control over the play that he has fabricated, his powerlessness is revealed, and immediately he discloses the truth behind the masque. The climax of his play, which allegedly celebrated the rite of restoration contained in Prospero's romance, is unveiled as being "the baseless fabric of [a] vision" (IV.I. 151). As the fertility ritual it has been traditionally considered, the masque should have resulted in the renewal of all life. But instead, once the ritual is revealed as a vision made up of "baseless fabric," the life that the great globe "inherit[s]" (IV.I. 154) fades away and "leave[s] not a rack behind." Thus the representation of a romance of regeneration, that is, Prospero's play construed around the themes of forgiveness, political restoration, natural renewal and spiritual redemption, becomes in truth a statement of ineluctable degeneration. Only within Prospero's transient and interrupted play "does order arrest mutability and control disorder" (Zimbardo 56).

THE NATURE OF EXISTENCE EAST OF EDEN

Prospero's play is a Jacobean masque about a powerful, legitimate king's restoration to power, and as such it is built upon the typically-romantic dichotomies that oppose order and disorder in the world of romance mythology, confronting "a stable society subject to a God-like monarch and an anarchic world of brutality and folly" (Hulme 235). Similarly to the ideology upon which the history plays are construed, also in *The Tempest* "the hierarchical opposition order /disorder or rule/misrule coincides with [the] political assumption (…) that the nation-state is the natural and necessary political form emerging from some kind of archaic disorder and consolidating itself against marginal forms of residual feudal anarchy or popular resistance" (Bristol 198-199). But as opposed to the history plays, which "seem inversive in respect to the relationship between rule and misrule [because] misrule and disorder are the pervasive, objective conditions of political life" (200), political order in *The Tempest* is not so much represented as irreparably violent and thus as an impossible correlative of preternatural order. Instead, political order, along with its legitimation through romance ideology, is represented as a baseless fabrication that cannot result in a cosmologically-determined

renovation of life outside of the boundaries of the mythology that articulates such ideology.

When Gonzalo, Prospero's former "old and honest councillor" (List of Characters 7), arrives on the island, he describes it as a paradisal land of plenty that seems conjured up from a daydream, rather than a reflection of the island's true nature:

> All things in common nature should produce
> Without sweat or endeavour: treason, felony,
> Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine,
> Would I not have; but nature should bring forth,
> Of its own kind, all foison, all abundance,
> To feed my innocent people (II.I. 155-160).

The description is, according to Wilders, "an objection" to Montaigne's essay "On the Cannibals" where the New World is unequivocally described as a literal Eden that is not only delightful and plentiful in its fertility, but also a kind of magical place where the natives do not grow old or ill.[65] As Wilder notes, the response to the essay in Gonzalo's words is contextualized by a set of ironies that in fact undercut Montaigne's idealistic contrast between innocent primitivism and corrupt civilization, in a manner that transforms such an opposition into a representation of the dialectics "between a vision of prelapsarian happiness and the imperfect postlapsarian reality" (Wilders 129), which is in fact relevant to the cultural context of the play. In this view, the prelapsarian happiness is explicitly identified with life in the Garden of Eden prior to Adam's original sin of disobedience, where "All things in common nature should produce / Without sweat or endeavour" (II.I. 155-156). In the Garden of Eden, before Adam's fall, man obtains sustenance from the plentiful land "without sweat or endeavour;" but contemporary England, as it was dramatized in the histories, is mythically represented as enduring "the nature of existence east of Eden" (Kernan 289). In this postlapsarian existence, *east of Eden*, the land has been laid waste without remedy. Man is not simply forced to earn the land's fruit with "sweat and endeavour;" east of Eden, as explained in depth in the previous chapter, the land will never bear fruit.[66] Life east of Eden is life in

[65] Montaigne explicitly describes the New World as a mythical land of plenty "with a most delightful countryside and a temperate climate, so that, for what I have been told by my sources, it is rare to find anyone ill there; I have been assured that they never saw a single man bent with age, toothless, blear-eyed or tottering" (84).
[66] See previous chapter, p. 66.

the Waste Land, with no hopes of regeneration; and so Gonzalo's dream-like vision of the island bears little resemblance to what life is really like under Prospero's rule.

After the inevitable corruption entailed by civilization, there is no going back. As Montaigne argues in "On the Cannibals," the fruit "produced by Nature in her ordinary course (…) we have artificially perverted and misled from the common order which we ought to call savage" (82). In a civilized world, Montaigne claims, mankind cannot access nature directly, because civilization always mediates nature and it "bastardize[s it] (…) by merely adapting [it] to our corrupt tastes" (83). In the civilized world, men cannot have direct, non-mediated access to nature and what nature provides. The civilized world is then irredeemably a Waste Land where mankind can no longer obtain what "nature should bring forth" (II.I. 158), because the abundance of the land is immediately bastardized to satisfy man's corrupted taste. In *The Tempest*, Montaigne's civilized world, defined by "the natural sterility of the fallen world" (Frye *Anatomy* 189), is mythically replaced so as to represent contemporary England. For as Skura explains, the play can be seen "to be not simply an allegory about 'timeless' or universal experience but rather a cultural phenomenon that has its origin in and effect on 'historical' events" (43).

Arguably, these historical events are fundamentally two, as New Historicism has pointed out: English colonialism (Skura 43) and "the power of the Stuart state" (Pask 397). The critical consideration of these issues as they are represented in the text allows for the interpretation of *The Tempest* within History, made possible by tracing the many ways in which contemporary reality penetrates and disrupts the mythical equilibrium of the romance enacted by Prospero on the stage.[67] For as Wilders explains, "life on Prospero's island is far removed from the ideal described by Ovid and reported by the Elizabethan voyagers. The inhabitants do not live 'without sweat or endeavour' but require the slave labour of Caliban to support them; far from lacking 'sovereignty' the island is governed by an usurper who has reduced Caliban to servitude in his own land" (129). Marshall concurs:

[67] One clear example of this, which has already been mentioned and will be discussed more in depth further on, is the scene in which Gonzalo's idealized vision of the island is constantly interrupted by the recurrent contempt and cynicism of Sebastian and Antonio, who mock Gonzalo's ecstatic contemplation and, appearing as the "corrupt sophisticates" (Wilders 129) that embody contemporary politics, make apparent the impossibility of Gonzalo's unreal daydream and its bitter contrast with the harsh and disparaging pragmatism of reality.

> On Prospero's island, we find a clearly defined ruler, his progeny, a potential royal marriage, a hierarchy of nobility, some more corrupt than others, an underclass, and even 'revel, riot and rebellion.' This is no mere fantasy; this is *cold reality dressed*, though very well, *in the language of the Romance genre*, but always firmly anchored to Jacobean reality. (288, my italics)

The Tempest dramatizes "cold reality" disguised in the language of romance. Arguably, Shakespeare's last play is a political play that enacts dominant discourses of royal authority through the appropriation of the conventions of romance; yet, as explained, insofar as such dominant ideology is dramatized through Prospero's romance-like play, it is ultimately represented in a process of collapse, and as being merely an immanent representation of regeneration that is vain and ineffectual. Certainly, Prospero's play, as a comedy of restoration, celebrates the triumph of the forces of fertility and abundance and portrays such forces as inextricable from a context of social and political reconciliation. But *The Tempest*, by staging Prospero's enactment of this romance-like play, inescapably reveals its artificiality. *The Tempest* may thus be argued to be not a romance after all, but the staging of a romance that attempts (and fails) to legitimize Prospero's dominion of the island by interconnecting dominant mythical and historical discourses.

As Orgel argues, Prospero's authority on the island is presented as legitimate precisely through the two normative modes of royal authority available in the England of 1610: inheritance and divinity (208). For at the time, James I claimed that his authority as king derived from both, God and his mother, perhaps because, as Orgel points out, "deriving one's legitimacy from Mary Queen of Scots was ambiguous at best" (209).[68] Caliban rather than Prospero parallels this dubious inheritance in *The Tempest*, as the former derives his claim to the island from the authority of his (evil) mother. But simultaneously, while Prospero is the legitimate ruler of Milan due to his dynastic right, he is (self-)characterized as the lawful governor of the island not through inheritance, but because he is (or claims to be) mystically connected to it and thus can magically control its environment. Significantly, the modes of royal authority that

[68] At a loss for an indisputable claim to the throne based solely on inheritance—as it is also the case of Prospero's rule over the island—James I "continually asserted his divinely ordained position" (Marshall 394), which resulted in the king's self-mythologization as being inherently divine himself. Marshall explains: "In his 1605 speech to parliament James claimed such an elevation 'since Kings are in the word of God it selfe called Gods, as being his Lieutenants and Vice-gerents on earth, and so adorned and furnished with some sparkles of the Diuinitie'. In his speech to parliament in I609 he again emphasized that 'Kings are not only God's lieutenants vpon earth and sit vpon God's throne, but euen by God himselfe they are called Gods'" (394).

legitimized James I's reign—not simply as King of England, but as *emperor* of England and Scotland with an increasing dominion of Ireland and North America (Marshall 393)—are diffused in the text, divided between Caliban and Prospero, thus reinforcing the ambiguity posed by the text in dramatizing the subject matter of royal authority.[69] Yet, as Marshall also notes, "to appreciate how the play deals with discourse on empire and the concomitant responsibilities one need only look to the imagery and discussion associated with Prospero's inordinate supply of power as a ruler over a foreign territory to which he has extended his government" (393). From Prospero's perspective, Caliban has no right to govern the island, as he inherited it from "the foul witch Sycorax" (I.II. 258), who only arrived on the island after being banished from Algiers "for mischiefs manifold, and sorceries terrible / to enter human hearing" (I.II. 264-265). Such is, from Prospero's perspective, no legitimate claim, a consideration that is supposedly substantiated by the fact that Caliban has no apparent influence over the environment in the way Prospero has.

Prospero's abilities to—apparently—control the weather and the spirits of the island certainly give the impression that "Prospero reigns over the enchanted island as a providential deity [and that] his power and his prescience are very nearly absolute" (Coby 231). There may be observed throughout the play a process of "deification of the monarch" (Marshall 393), which, from a myth-ritualist standpoint, allows for the argument that "Prospero also relates to the magical kings described by Frazer, who control rain" (Williams par. 22). In this view, Prospero is the magical king of the island, capable of creating the tempest that sets the dramatic events in action and that eventually "leads to the restoration of order and fertility" (par. 22). As already explained, the process of royal succession enacted in Prospero's play through the regenerative marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda operates as "a displacement of the theme of renewing the old king's youth" (Frye *Secular* 121) and thus Prospero can be argued to embody the dramatic counterpart of the medieval, *divine* Maimed King, whose youth and health must be restored into a young and more vigorous successor so

[69] An in-depth analysis of how mythical structures function in Shakespeare's major tragedies would necessarily limit the scope of the present study to the exploration of how the myth of the Waste Land is reinterpreted in early modern drama exclusively. However, it should at least be mentioned that Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (ca. 1606) also features similar concerns regarding the legitimacy of royal authority. Like the political plays so far analyzed, the tragedy gives account of contemporary anxieties regarding the legitimacy of violence and political authority in a historical context defined by the development from Feudalism to the Absolutist State, in which the exclusive source of legitimacy is the figure of the monarch (Sinfield 63).

that the Waste Land can be redeemed.[70] Yet once again, the restoration of Prospero's youth and health, displaced in Ferdinand and Miranda's political inheritance, is a happy resolution confined exclusively to the events enacted in Prospero's play, which, as explained, eventually escapes the playwright/character's control and, at last, collapses and disappears.

For in truth, Prospero has no real power over the natural world. He does not conjure up a tempest so much as he *coerces* Ariel—there is also no magic involved in Prospero's dominion of the spirit—to create the *illusion* of a tempest (Egan 154) that poses no real threat to the other characters, because it is not real.[71] These circumstances, as the scene of the masque demonstrates, are a constant in the *performance* of Prospero's magical powers, and thus, in the end, the divine and God-like king who, like the king of the Waste Land, is believed to be mystically interconnected with the land that he governs, is revealed to be little more than a simple juggler or illusionist (Mowat 185). The *unreality* of the mysticism traditionally attributed to the masque, as already argued, is undeniable. Thus, when Ferdinand "transfers the status of divinity from the spirits enacting the masque to Prospero their master" (Coby 226), claiming that Prospero "makes this place paradise" (IV.I. 124), the unreality of the pretend enchantment is transferred to Prospero as well. Immediately, Ferdinand's (false) revelation about Prospero's divinity is shadowed by Prospero's relinquishing control: the masque collapses and is revealed as an "insubstantial pageant" (IV.I. 155) and, instantly, Prospero's "infirmity" (IV.I. 160) is exposed.

[70] In Eliot's *The Waste Land*, as textual signifiers recurrently multiply to refer to one specific mythical signified, Ferdinand himself is uncannily identified with the mythical Fisher King at the beginning of "The Fire Sermon." However, the ambiguous family connections of this Fisher-King figure allow for him to be identified with Ferdinand and Antonio simultaneously. Moreover, in a manner reminiscent of Malory's dynastic recurrence of Maimed-King figures, both characters—simultaneously given voice to by the poetic self—are subsequently identified as counterparts of a father and a brother, predecessors and doubles of the present-time Fisher Kings—"On a winter evening round behind the gashouse / Musing upon the king my brother's wreck / And on the king my father's death before him" (*TWL* 190-192)—so that, ultimately, every kingly dramatis personae in *The Tempest* (that is: Ferdinand, Antonio, Alonso *and* Prospero) are characterized as Maimed King figures in Eliot's poem. See also p. X, note X.

[71] After Prospero asks Ariel whether he has "*performed* to point the tempest that [he] bade" (I.I, 194, my italics), Ariel describes to Prospero how he *simulated* a storm: "I boarded the King's ship; now on the beak, / Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin, / I flamed amazement. Sometime I'd divide / And burn in many places; on the topmast, / The yards and bowsprit would I flame distinctly, / Then meet and join" (I.II. 196-201).

At the end of the play, Prospero is openly portrayed as old and sick; the identification with the Maimed King of medieval romance is on point. The restoration of the old, sick king's royal lineage in the union of Ferdinand and Miranda—the displacement of the restoration of his health—should entail, in mythical terms, the restoration of the physical and spiritual Waste Land that has arguably resulted from the convulsed political disputes and recurrent acts of usurpation that characterize the socio-political atmosphere of Prospero's reign. But as argued, Prospero's art can only give shape and order to chaos within the limits of a fabricated enactment that is transient and that, more to the point, possesses no actual ritualistic force to permeate and transform reality. Prospero's play, as Zimbardo notes, takes the characters away from the flux of life in order to control them, but the result of such an *artistic* endeavour can never be the restoration of life, for it happens *outside* of life (51). So Ariel sings:

> Full fathom five thy father lies,
> Of his bones are coral made;
> Those are pearls that were his eyes;
> Nothing of him that doth fade,
> Both doth suffer a sea-change
> Into something rich and strange.
> Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell.
> Hark, now I hear them: ding dong bell. (I.II. 395-402)

Zimbardo eloquently elaborates on the meaning of this song, by arguing that Alonso's transformation through death into something beautiful and durable (a *fake* transformation, as this is one of Ariel's make-believes: Alonso has not died) "is not [a process] of regeneration into something more nobly human, and despite the interest of the Twentieth Century in Frazer's *Golden Bough*, there is nothing here that suggests fertility, rather the human and impermanent is transfixed into a rich permanence, but a *lifeless* one" (55, my italics).[72] Indeed, in Ariel's song, Prospero's enchantments are once again proved to have no regenerative influence over the forces of life: they only crystallize life into a form of durable but lifeless art. Prospero is not connected with the

[72] This argument is very persuasive and it serves to elucidate the often misinterpreted leitmotif in *The Waste Land*, "Those are pearls that were his eyes," as signifying not regeneration—that is, a transition from death to life—but a transition from death to a state of perpetual and irreparable lifelessness. See pp. 202-203.

force and sources of life. Meaningfully, it is Caliban who is directly identified with the land. Prospero directly refers to him as "Thou earth" (I.II. 314), and not in vain Prospero needs Caliban in order to survive on his (supposedly) own land, which will not yield to him. Certainly, it seems, Prospero's art never truly manages to overpower nature and, surely, his attempts to do so are often portrayed as ultimately destructive.

An influential ecocritical[73] reading of *The Tempest* suggests that that "Prospero's main activity since his arrival on the island has been its deforestation" (Egan 155), which seems to indicate that Prospero's influence on the environment of the island has been mostly deleterious. In fact, as Fitz notes, "there is no evidence whatsoever to show that there is any kind of cultivation or domestication of animals on the island" (43); after twelve years on the island, and even though he has been traditionally considered as embodying civilization, Prospero has clearly failed to take any profit from nature. In fact, like Cain, Prospero cannot cultivate the land; he depends on Caliban to obtain sustenance from an unyielding earth that is therefore characterized, explicitly, by the sterility of a wasteland. The soil of the island is only "lush and lusty" (II.I. 52) as envisioned by Gonzalo's idealized daydream of the island as a prelapsarian Eden, but his enraptured reveries are immediately thwarted by Antonio's and Sebastian's cynical remarks:

> GONZALO
> Here is everything advantageous to life.
> ANTONIO
> True, save means to live.
> SEBASTIAN
> Of that there's none, or little.
> GONZALO
> How lush and lusty the grass looks! How green!
> ANTONIO
> The ground indeed is tawny.
> SEBASTIAN
> With an eye of green in't.
> ANTONIO
> He misses not much.
> SEBASTIAN
> No; he doth but mistake the truth totally. (II.I. 49-56)

[73] Ecocriticism is best defined as a critical movement that solidified and grew popular in the decade of 1990 and that, in broad terms, aims at exploring, critically and often ethically, the relationship between literature and the environment. For a thorough description of the genesis, purposes, and differences within this critical movement, see Buell, "The Ecocritical Insurgency." The addition of an ecocritical commentary on *The Tempest* in this study is due to its pertinence when reassessing the dialectics of nature and culture as endorsed in romance mythology and subverted in Shakespeare's play.

Explicitly, "the island is presented as a place of harsh physical reality rather than as a lush and beautiful place where all is well" (Fitz 47). But environmental harshness in the portrayal of nature is starkly contrasted with the imagery of abundance—"Earth's increase, and foison plenty, / Barns and garners never empty, / Vines, with clust'ring bunches growing, / Plants, with goodly burden bowing" (IV.I. 110-114)—that pervades the masque, in a way that starkly contrasts, as Fitz states, "the sterility of the island and the fertility of the masque" (47). The overabundant harvest imagery of the masque, which links crop fertility and marriage fecundity (Fitz 43), is limited thus to the performance; it has no effect upon life, and thus all that remains after the masque collapses is "our *little* life" (IV.I. 157, my italics). So whether one interprets Prospero's self-romanticizing journey as leading toward deep spirituality or as a juggling attempt to bring about a happy ending for his own story, "the final image of Prospero which lingers in our minds is of the mortal creature of the epilogue" (Mowat 187). Far from incarnating Providence itself, as critics such as Leech have traditionally claimed (100), Prospero lingers at the end of the play as a powerless and infirm usurper, lost in the absorbed contemplation of the vanity of his art and of the 'littleness' of life, in a dramatic paralysis that Greenblatt has defined as a "profession of infirmity" (145):

> (…) We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep. Sir, I am vexed.
> Bear with my weakness: my old brain is troubled.
> Be not disturbed with my infirmity.
> If you be pleased, retire into my cell
> And there repose. A turn or two I'll walk
> To still my beating mind. (IV.I. 156-163)

The failure—or rather the impossibility to succeed—of the fertility rite represented by the masque leaves behind only a "little life" that seems to anticipate the "little life" of the conscious, perhaps even talking corpses looking up from their burial place at the spring rebirth of the land, at the beginning of *The Waste Land*. These are corpses, Levenson argued, that are not truly dead, and so they rise from the grave as the poem continues, wandering the earth in a permanent, in-between state of transit connecting life and death (172).[74] In *The Tempest*, the characters are not corpses

[74] See p. 207.

breeding “a little life”—“little” because it is only the little life that remains in the dead who rise from their graves. But the “little life” that remains at the end of Shakespeare’s play is not much different. It is the little life of the *image* of a life rite that cannot bring about regeneration, because in its artistic recreation of life it is in effect *replacing* life, and thus suppressing it. It is the lifeless beauty of the pearls that were Antonio’s eyes. It is the statement of the unreality of romance mythology and the vanity of its underlying mysticism. It is the denial of the possibility of regeneration through art.

As Prospero’s descends from seemingly divine monarch to despairing pretender, the revelation of the vanity of his fancies enacts, in effect, a crucial *mythical* change. Or rather, it exposes and ratifies the mythical change already dramatized through the history plays examined in the previous chapters. For in *The Tempest*, medieval myth is only represented in the romance staged by Prospero: the courtly love of Ferdinand and Miranda, and the subsequent tale of political reconciliation and spiritual (and natural) restoration brought about by their union in divinely-sanctioned marriage. But medieval myth is also contested from within the play, and by exposing the “baseless fabric” of Prospero’s masque, *The Tempest* manages to actually deploy a counter-discourse that challenges the dominant discourse of the ideologically-charged mythology of romance. By the revelation of its immanence, myth is evacuated off all traces of legitimizing mysticism, and royal authority becomes extricated from any mythical allegations of providentialism, transcendence and preternatural order. In the Epilogue, the island remains bare; “the masque’s majestic vision of plenitude” (Greenblatt 144) is followed by a “sublime vision of emptiness” (145), and the regenerative movement of romance is thus disclosed as a temporary artefact. The “ideal structure of moral and magical law” (Kermode LV) of romance ideology is dramatically confronted with an antithetical reality, an “isle full of noises” (III.II. 133) that resists the ordering efforts of art. And so, while *representing* romance, the play effectively disrupts the social, political and ideological function of the genre (or mode) as a legitimizing discourse, which up until then had unquestionably conveyed the naturalness and universality of the social and power structures that had organized the communal life of the ruling classes from the Middle Ages and which, at the age of Shakespeare, were beginning to visibly crack.

PART II
THE KNIGHT'S QUEST

REPRESENTATION AND REINTERPRETATION OF THE WASTE LAND MYTH IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH ROMANCE

CHAPTER 4

HISTORICAL ROMANCE: RECONSTRUCTING MYTH IN WALTER SCOTT'S *WAVERLEY*

A COUNTERFEIT ROMANCE

The revival of romance in the British literary tradition is commonly attributed to Horace Walpole's publication of *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), considered as the "founding text" (Andriopoulos 739) of Gothic literature. Notoriously, Walpole's short novel was originally published as the translation (by the hand of the fictitious Anglican William Marshall) of a text "found in the library of an ancient catholic family in the north of England" (Walpole 5). Such a text had allegedly been printed in Naples in the year 1529, and was presented by Walpole as the retelling of a *true* medieval romance that, "if the story was written near the time when it is supposed to have happened, it must have been between 1095, the æra of the first crusade, and 1243, the date of the last, or not long afterwards" (5).[1] This version of the origins of the tale, however, was contradicted only a year later, when in 1765 Walpole published a second edition of the novel revealing this multiplicity of sources to be but a literary artifice crafted so as to ensure the pseudo-historicism that traditionally characterized romances of chivalry.[2] In disclosing the counterfeit historicity of his allegedly *true* romance, then, Walpole

[1] That is, the original tale of the Castle of Otranto could allegedly pre-date the earliest extant version of the Grail romances (ca. 1180).
[2] See Daniel Eisenberg's "The Pseudo-Historicity of the Romances of Chivalry."

claimed to be creating a new genre or, rather, a new *form* of romance that he called "Gothic" (3).

This new form proposed to "blend two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern [as] in the former all was imagination and improbability: in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success" (9). 'Modern' romance here refers to the kind of novel that arose as a new genre during the eighteenth century, in which, as Walpole argues, "invention has not been wanting; but the great resources of fancy have been dammed up, by a strict adherence to common life" (9). Walpole's blend aimed to fuse the tradition of "the mainly aristocratic romance of quests, long-separated lovers, recovered nobility, and occasional divine intervention" (Hogle "Romance" 216) with the "fictions of domestic life and individual development" (216) that proliferated in Walpole's age and which, as Clery argues, "evolved in the fist half of the eighteenth century as a reaction to the romance tradition that had flourished up to the late seventeenth century" ("Genesis" 22). The result is a "curious variation on romance [that] has helped us, for two-and-a-half centuries of modern (in the sense of post-Enlightenment) existence, both confront and distance many of the most profound contradictions in our cultural lives, at least for the Western middle class (the Gothic's main readership)" (Hogle "Romance" 217).

The eighteenth-century romance, then, even though it does not "involv[e] a break with the old fashioned romances" (Watt *Rise* 10), is in fact a new form, a variation with regards to "old romances" (Walpole 9), which proliferate in the 1750s and 1760s in England (Hogle "Romance" 217) so as to "reclaim a fading imaginative (as well as *broadly* Christian) birthright, to some extent a national mythology, highly desirable for the modern mind as long as he also fulfils the newer Enlightenment dictum 'to conduct the mortal agents of his drama according to the rules of probability'" (Hogle "Romance" 218). As it will be argued later in this chapter, the revival of romance in the eighteenth (and nineteenth) century operates as the retrieval of a mythology—the myths contained in medieval romance—that is felt in fact as a national mythology; yet, insofar as this mythology is only "highly desirable for the modern mind" as long as it is represented according to the neoclassical rules of decorum, the new form of romance will rewrite medieval myths so that they can give account of the social and ideological specificities of eighteenth and nineteenth-century England.

As Fred Botting notes, "the literary and fictional background of the Gothic revival is clearly manifested as an artificial or fabricated aesthetic phenomenon" (4). This is

clear in *The Castle of Otranto*, which is composed by successive layers of counterfeiting. The fake translation of a fake text (written by a fake translator) retells a fake medieval romance (Botting 4), and it functions as the frame narrative embedding the story of "a false nobleman unlawfully inheriting both title and property through a false will and attempting to secure a false lineage through nefarious schemes" (4). Hence the reinterpretation of medievalism as retrieved in eighteenth-century romance focuses on fraudulence and is based on disclosing the *artificiality* of the genre. It can then be analyzed as a continuation of the trend in reinterpreting romance myths already explored in the previous chapter of the present study. As Hogle argues in a different essay, the medieval elements (signifieds) that are retrieved in the Gothic texts through references to the Middle Ages (signifiers) are not in truth the material from the actual medieval sources, but the medieval heritage after it has been shifted through the prism of the Renaissance, for, as Clery explains, the influence of Shakespearian romance was fundamental for the romance revival in Britain ("Genesis" 30).[3] Consequently, in the initial Gothic romance, "the Renaissance counterfeit of the medieval [becomes] the evacuated 'signified' of the Gothic signifier, which is thus the ghost of the counterfeit. The neo-Gothic is therefore haunted by the ghost of that already spectral past and hence by its refaking of what is already fake and already an emblem of the nearly empty and dead" (Hogle "Ghost" 298). This "refaking" is textually symbolized by the haunting apparitions in *The Castle of Otranto*—defined by Hogle as "ghosts of representations, spectres of counterfeits" ("Ghost" 293)—which, rather than taking the form of Theodore's ancestors, appear in the form of a portrait, an armour, or even the fragments of an armour.

Following this argument, it can then be hypothesized that the representation of medieval myth in Walpole's novel perpetuates the revision of the Waste Land myth in a manner similar to the process of mythical subversion already explored in the study of *The Tempest*. The plot of *Otranto* explicitly mirrors the narrative pattern made up of the Waste Land mythemes—namely: unfit king, blighted land, and legitimate royal restoration—that articulates the myth in late medieval romances, in which the issue of

[3] "Historically, [Shakespeare] was situated on the cusp between Gothic and enlightened times. His plays where believed to combine the benefits of Protestantism and Renaissance learning with ready access to the resources of popular folklore and Popish superstition, so conductive to the imagination. Even his language was regarded as striking a perfect balance between ancient and modern" (Clery "Genesis" 30).

youthful succession becomes crucial.[4] Walpole's novel closes with the installation of Theodore, the lawful prince of Otranto, after "the horrors of these days, the vision we have but now seen, all corroborate" (Walpole 114) that he is the true heir of the noble but ill-fated Alfonso the Good, the former prince. Only after the legitimate heir, Theodore, succeeds Manfred, "the usurper of Otranto" (60), can the heavens "put an end to the woes of this deplorable province" (95); that is to say, only after the usurper is cast off and the dynastic equilibrium is re-established, can the Waste Land be restored. The narrative pattern of medieval myth is thus unambiguous and functional. Explicitly, Hogle argues that the "hidden supernatural intentions of an obviously divine kind" involved in the recovery of Theodore's birthright reminisce the thirteen-century Vulgate French *Lancelot* and the *Quest of the Holy Grail* ("Romance" 219), which, as already explained,[5] are the most relevant late-medieval romances in which the Maimed King's restoration to health is displaced into a narrative of dynastic reinstallation. This archetypal narrative of dynastic legitimacy is then as crucial in the process of mythical representation carried out by the 'new' romances of eighteenth and nineteenth-century England, as it was in the mythically-subversive Renaissance plays previously examined.

But, as mentioned, in Walpole's novel the medieval sign, that is, the medieval myth recreated in the narrative, is not the myth as narrated in the medieval sources, but "the medieval sign now receding behind Renaissance representations of it" (Hogle "Ghost" 298). The mythical reference is then already a fake representation of myth, so that the new form of romance stresses even more emphatically than, for instance, *The Tempest*, the artificiality and deceit of romance conventions. Eloquently, *The Castle of Otranto* emphasizes such artificiality and deceit through the composition of a plot that revolves precisely around the subject matter of legitimacy, and in which divine claims of rightful inheritance are particularly stressed within Manfred's self-legitimizing *fake* narrative about his *false* right to sovereignty. For expressively, the ideology of the romance myth that legitimizes monarchic power and dynastic rights, even as it structures the narrative of political restoration contained in Walpole's novel, is made

[4] The pattern of the Waste Land myth is effectively functional in Walpole's novel, as Otranto is hunted because the Prince (the King, in mythical terms) is not only an usurper but, symbolically, also impotent: "Manfred is purely 'titular,' Conrad, the brother, is infirm and sickly, and Hipppolita, Manfred's wife, though amiable, is of little consequence because of 'her own sterility' for giving Manfred 'but one heir' (…) [Hippolita's] 'sterility' (the fact that she cannot produce another son) symbolically makes Manfred impotent" (Mishra 61-2).

[5] See introduction, p. 13.

significantly more explicit and repetitive within Manfred's—that is, the usurper's—fake self-legitimation, than in the tale of Theodore's right restoration.[6]

Recurrently, romance ideology is overtly verbalized in situations that highlight its fraudulence. As usurper, Manfred is an unfit prince in mythical terms, and as such he is represented as heirless; yet throughout most of the narrative he blames his wife Hippolita, accusing her of sterility, and claiming that "too long has she cursed me by her unfruitfulness" and that his fate "depends on having sons" (Walpole 25). He admits, at the very end, that the terrible curse fallen upon Otranto is a divine occurrence that has punished his principality for the crime of his usurpation, and thus each plea for the perpetuation of his royal linage is ultimately revealed as either a blatant lie or a self-serving delusion. So that he can "preserv[e his] race" (26), Manfred means to force himself on his dead son's betrothed, his "contracted daughter" (50), in an act of incestuous rape that, he claims, obeys to "reasons of state, most urgent reasons" that demand that he should have a son for, he says, "my own and the safety of my people" (49). Explicitly, in Manfred's allegations that only his marriage to Matilda "will divert the calamities that are hanging over our heads, and have the merit of saving the principality of Otranto from destruction" (50), the ideological foundation of the Waste Land myth, in origin—that is, the belief in the generative sexuality of the King as the life-giving principle that sustains and orders all forms of life in society—is reclaimed by Manfred in a blatant attempt to justify—by "reasons of state"—an act of mere lust and power-greed. Romance ideology is represented, if not as intrinsically fraudulent, at least as easily appropriable by power-hungry usurpers seeking to justify their greed, and as such it is made explicit in a narrative context that emphasizes the subject matter of deceit and fraudulence, which, as mentioned, articulate the structure and the plot of the novel. Robert Miles summarizes:

> One way of thinking about Horace Walpole's *Otranto* is that it rings the changes on 'legitimacy'. The work is fake, a pretend medieval text; it is a product of literary miscegenation, of the illicit blending of romance and novel; the plot concerns an act of usurpation; the action skirts what was, in law, incest; and in the figure of Theodore it raises the question of the legal, biological heir. (50)

[6] Such was also the case in *The Tempest*, where, as explained in the previous chapter, the legitimizing ideology of romance mythology was appropriated by Prospero to justify his usurpation over Caliban (see p. 64.)

Like *The Tempest*, *The Castle of Otranto* raises questions about legitimacy, and, also like Shakespeare's last play, it does not provide unambiguous answers.[7] Like *The Tempest*, Walpole's novel overtly appears as a tale of political restoration, but in the end, as in Shakespeare's play, the story "does not end with a supernatural apotheosis of simple restored lineage" (Hogle "Romance" 220). Theodore inherits his princedom, but loses his beloved Matilda and must marry Isabella instead who, as Hogle notes, "can only be the image of what Theodore has lost forever in the past" (220).[8] The literal, political reconciliation found at the end of *The Tempest* through the marriage of the royal children of two feuding political parties is thus thwarted in *The Castle of Otranto*. Another kind of political marriage, *almost* interchangeable, is eventually arranged, and in consequence the melancholy of the old, infirm King—Prospero's last sorrowful words in the epilogue of the play—is replaced in Walpole's novel by the melancholy of the supposedly young and vigorous successor that restores legitimacy to the principality of Otranto. The novel ends as follows:

> The friar ceased. The *disconsolate* company retired to the *remaining part* of the castle. In the morning Manfred signed his abdication of the principality, with the approbation of Hippolita, and each took on them the habit of religion in the neighbouring convents.[9] Frederic offered his daughter to the new prince, which Hippolita's tenderness for Isabella concurred to promote: *but Theodore's grief was too fresh to admit the thought of another love*; and it was not till after frequent discourses with Isabella, of his dear Matilda, that he was persuaded he could know no happiness but in the society of one with whom *he could forever indulge the melancholy that had taken possession of his soul*. (Walpole 115, my italics)

As Hogle states, "no earlier romance worthy of the name has ever ended this way" ("Romance" 221). Indeed, *The Castle of Otranto*, "pull[s] the rug from under the usual union at the completion of most romance quests to leave readers only with a desire for a

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[7] See previous chapter, p. 100.

[8] The interpretation of Isabella as an image of Matilda is reinforced by their inter-changeability throughout the narrative (Hogle "Romance" 220). The fact that Manfred actually kills his own daughter believing her to be Isabella helps to regard Isabella as a sort of ghost of Matilda, and thus nothing but a lingering echo of the love that Theodore has lost irretrievably. As it will be later on discussed, the replacing of Matilda with Isabella in the final reconciling union that closes the romance is somehow mirrored in the ending of the other 'new' romance analyzed in this chapter, Walter Scott's *Waverley*, which ends with the hero choosing to marry Rose in a politically-restorative union, after he cannot have the love of the woman who truly embodied the romance ideal, the highlander Flora Mac-Ivor.

[9] The fact that *The Castle of Otranto* ends with the abdication of Manfred instead of with his death might also be interpreted as a deviation from the ritual origins that determined the prevalence of the 'killing the king' in Renaissance reinterpretations of the Waste Land myth, and thus another element pointing towards the frustration of the expectations of regeneration contained in Walpole's romance.

past object—perhaps old romance itself—irretrievable lost behind an image that does not finally contain it" (221). Thus the new form of romance, even though riddled with references to medieval romance, "neither continue[s] nor compete[s] with most of medieval romance's fundamental drives" (220), instead giving account of the cultural tensions of a period of transition from aristocratic order to bourgeois capitalism (Hogle "Romance" 221; Clery *Rise* 77). The friar of Otranto makes this ideological transformation explicit, and also taints it with a sorrowful expression of pessimism, when he exclaims: "But alas! my lord, what is blood? what is nobility? We are all reptiles, miserable sinful creatures. It is piety alone that can distinguish us from the dust whence we sprung, and wither we must return" (Walpole 58). The mystical force of blood and the inherent power of nobility are denied, replaced by the certitude that all men are but dust, for only such mindset can pervade a romance in which all referents to its medieval counterpart are presented as fake. The result is a tale in which the "hollowed-out fragments of formerly aristocratic romance", which embody the principles of the old regime— "male inheritance, restored linage, claims for 'divine will', and political marriages" (Hogle "Romance" 221)—still confine and reduce the characters' possibilities of pursuing their aspirations in modern society. But in the new form of romance, as Hogle summarizes, and as it will be also demonstrated through a myth-critical interpretation of Scott's *Waverley*, "gone is any expansive quest across many locations, and what replaces it is a very private, even middle-class-sounding dispute of claimants over the inheritance of money and property, all which is laced with the eighteenth-century psychology of personal (and usually upper middle-class) 'sentiment'" (119).

Such constitutes, in Clive Probyn's words, "an Enlightenment view of romance," the first characteristic of which is its self-consciousness, since, as he argues, "romance always contains the ingredients of what it denies" (252). Walpole's characters are haunted by ghosts that take the form of portraits and empty armours, that is, by hollowed-up reminders of the past (Hogle "Romance" 221), which somehow embody the blending of the wild imagination of old romance and the realistic decorum of the 'new' novel (may the tautology be excused) in an attempt to reconcile "the irreconcilable opposites that th[e] ghosts of monstrosities are now made to contain: their being empty and still powerful, simultaneously broken apart and longed for, both models for desire and blocks to its attainment" (221). The 'new' romance is "the mixture of romance and mimesis" (Botting 10), and therefore presents "a clash between

a series of conflicting codes of representation" (Miles 11), which in turn becomes the defining trait of the romance mode—and of myth representation—from this point onwards, up until (and throughout) the twentieth century.

ROMANCE AND ROMANTICISM

Baldick and Mighall denounce what they refer to as "the assimilation of Gothic fiction into romantic and pre-romantic nostalgia for the Middle Ages" (213), which they actually consider a "cardinal error" (213). Far from debating such a claim, as it does not pertain to the subject matter of this study, this chapter argues concurrently that the romance revival *and romance transformation* that takes place in Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*,[10] and which is not necessarily extendable to the subsequent Gothic tradition, can in fact be aligned with certain processes of mythical representation in the Romantic Novel of the first half of the nineteenth-century, the greatest exponent of which, as Fiona Robertson argues, is the Scottish novelist Walter Scott (287 and ff.). Thus, after the introduction of the romance revival through this brief commentary of Walpole's foundational novel, the second (and longer) part of this chapter will explore the evolution of romance mythology and ideology in the subversive reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth in Scott's novel *Waverley* (1814).

As it will be examined from this point onwards, the evolution of the romance mode throughout the nineteenth century British literary tradition constitutes the process of mythical representation and reinterpretation that culminates, inexorably, in the overtly mythical literature of Anglo-American high modernism. For Walter Scott's *Waverley* is, indeed, the first text of the nineteenth-century romance canon that eloquently carries on the process of reinterpreting the Waste Land myth as a myth of degeneration already initiated in the post-medieval representations of the myth analyzed in previous chapters; and, moreover, the reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth in *Waverley* can be successfully explored as the continuation of a trend already intuited in

[10] Arguably, the other key text—along with *The Castle of Otranto*—of the revival of romance in the second half of the eighteenth century is Clara Reeve's *The Progress of Romance* (1785), if only because of the "contentious" (Clery "Genesis" 35) presupposition that romance, as a literary form, can in fact, *progress*. The return of romance may be thus understood not simply as a revival, but arguably as an *evolution*, which, as far as it concerns the critical focus of this study, is the key issue to be taken into consideration.

The Castle of Otranto.[11] As it will be argued throughout this chapter, *Waverley* shares with *Otranto* a core narrative of political restoration that seems to lift the curse that plights the Waste Land, but that is in truth superimposed with an echo of melancholy that connotes the ineluctable futility of longing for the recovery of a lost past that is already known to be irretrievable.

Northrop Frye argued that the eighteenth-century novel, which came to a reading public familiar with the formula of romance, was in fact "a realistic displacement of romance" (*Secular* 38), and that, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, "The Waverley novels of Scott mark[ed] the absorption of realistic displacement into romance itself" (40). From this perspective, the counter-romantic movement that determines the rise of the realistic novel in the eighteenth-century seems to be assimilated and reverted by the romantic novel of the nineteenth century. Frey argues about Scott's novels: "The same building blocks appeared every time: light and dark heroines, outlawed or secret societies, wild women changing prophecies, heroes of mysterious and ultimately fortunate birth" (5); and following this argument, Fiona Robertson goes as far as claiming that it was in fact Scott who "had the creative and technical brilliance to reassert the place of romance at the heart of a literary culture" (287). Notwithstanding the literary merits (or lack thereof) of Scott's romances, the study of his first novel *Waverley* in this chapter aims to reassess this alleged reassertion of romance, by examining the exposure and subversion of mythical motifs and structures that characterize the hero-journey towards communal regeneration of Scott's Perceval figure, the young, naïve, idealistic and *wavering* Waverley.

Hennelly follows Frye and Joseph Campbell to identify Waverley with the archetypal hero of the monomyth,[12] defined as,

[11] For the historical connection between Walter Scott and *The Castle of Otranto*, which Scott considered a historical novel that actually "dr[ew] such a picture of domestic life and manners during the feudal times as might actually have existed" (qt. in Mack 370), see Mack, R.'s "Horace Walpole and the Objects of Literary History" (2008). Additionally, Chandler notes that *Otranto* was Scott's favourite book when he was twelve years old (319); and Gamer corroborates that in fact Scott was editing *The Castle of Otranto* at the time when he was writing *Waverley* (500). He summarizes the similarities between both novels, relevant insofar as they insists upon the theme of counterfeit legitimacy: "The novels share the claim of belatedness: composed many years after the historical events they narrate and published still more years after their supposed composition. (…) Where Walpole presents a thirteenth-century story transcribed in 1529 in Sicily as a piece of Counter-Reformation propaganda, then translated and published in 1764 by the head of a pseudonymous Catholic (and likely Jacobite) family in the north of England, Scott provides a novel set in 1745, supposedly composed in 1805, and published a decade later by an unknown Scottish author" (500).

[12] See p. 370 (note 88) and p. 402.

> the scapegoat-quester who in passing through a series of rites de passage (…) not only indicates and completes his own growth from innocence, through experience, to wisdom, but also either like Odysseus therapeutically saves the sick kingdom by bringing back the prize, even if it is only his now mature self, or else like Aeneas establishes a new kingdom, reconciling the old values with the new ones learned during the journey. (195)

This interpretation, Hennelly considers, may lead to an "interesting" and "valuable" identification of Waverley with Galahad—that is, a *successful* Grail Knight—and the Baron with the Fisher King (195), except for the fact that the restoration finally brought about by Waverley's heroic endeavours to the Baron and his state in the lowlands, Tully-Veolan, only corresponds with the resolution of one of the romance plots narrated throughout the novel, and it does not bring about the regeneration of the mythical Waste Land represented in the text. For in fact, as it will be explained, *Waverley* articulates in the form of romance a narrative of cultural and historical dissolution; that is, the irretrievable loss of Highland culture after the English colonization of the territory. It is such a story of cultural loss that is shaped as a romance in Scott's novel, but, moreover, it is through the conventions of romance that Highland culture is re-appropriated and ultimately annihilated. For it is through the conventions of the romance mode that historical events are reshaped and moulded so as to apparently adopt the form and meaning of a traditional myth of restoration.

TELLING A STORY ABOUT HISTORY

In his assessment of Scott's work, Daiches claimed that the Waverley Novels possess "a sense of the impotence of the traditional kind of heroism, a passionately regretful awareness of the fact that the Good Old Cause was lost forever and the glory of Scotland must give way to her interest" (84).[13] Romance thus serves the ideological

[13] As it is explained in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "the Waverley Novels [are] a series of more than two dozen historical novels published by Sir Walter Scott between 1814 and 1832. Although the novels were extremely popular and strongly promoted at the time, he did not publicly reveal his authorship of them until 1827. Notable works in the series include *Waverley* (1814), *Guy Mannering* (1815), *Rob Roy* (1817), *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818), *Ivanhoe* (1819), *Kenilworth* (1821), *Quentin Durward* (1823), and *Redgauntlet* (1824)." Julian D'Arcy has challenged what he defines as the "Daichean Paradigm" (56), claiming that these novels, as argued in this chapter in the case of *Waverley*, advance a "dissonant discourse" (57) with regards to the official and dominant ideology that celebrates Hanoverian unionism. Nevertheless, the so-called 'Daichean Paradigm' corresponds in fact to the traditional interpretation of the Waverley novels, according to which, to quote Daiches himself, these novels "take the form of a sort of

purposes of political pragmatism, which seems to fall in the irresolvable paradox of a realistic, perhaps even pessimistic representation of romance ideals. The romance ideal, in the case of *Waverley*, is identified with the Jacobite cause and its tragic defeat in the uprising of 1745,[14] which once "emplotted"[15] in a romance narrative is made to "symbolize at once the attractiveness and the futility of the old Scotland" (87). Romance then stands as the correlative of a story of futility, which undoubtedly constitutes a revision of the underlying meaning of romance, because the plot of regeneration that structures Scott's novel does not in fact provide its full meaning, but oppositely stands in stark contrast to the loss of an idealized romance-like culture, the loss of which can never be recovered. In this view, and as Daiches also notes, the "highest function" of *Waverley* is coincidental with the highest function of Shakespeare's historical plays, as both the Histories—in their dramatization of historical narratives "emplotted" as romance—and Scott's 'romance of futility,' so to speak, represent the conflict "between the old world of heroic action and the new world of commercial progress" (93).[16]

But the functionality of romance in *Waverley* goes further than an expression of lament for an ideal lost past. As Kerr explains, "while he suggests that romance is a form of false consciousness, Scott employs it as a way of excluding history from his fiction, of keeping the past at a distance and thereby reducing its disruptive force" (19). Romance is a deliberate misrepresentation in Scott's novel, and it possesses a "deformative effect" (Kerr 19) that goes beyond the protagonist's "false consciousness." Young Waverley's hyper-aesthetic personality is surely the result of his "undisciplined reading" (Daiches 92) of all kinds of literature "so long as it afforded him amusement"

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pilgrim's progress: an Englishman or a Lowland Scot goes north into the Highlands of Scotland at a time when Scottish feeling is running high, he becomes involved in the passions and activities of the Scots partly by accident and partly by sympathy, and he eventually extricates himself—physically altogether but emotionally not quite wholly—and returns whence he came" (86).

[14] Historian Fremont-Barnes summarizes: "The Jacobite Rebellion of 1745 represents both a tragic episode in Scottish history and the greatest crisis to threaten British security in the 18th century. At once bold and brilliant, and marked by the leadership of the young, adventurous 'Bonnie Prince Charlie', the rebellion sought to restore the Stuart dynasty to the British throne, and it placed its principal hopes for success on those somewhat improbably romantic icons, the Highland clans, whose very way of life changed forever with the disaster at Culloden, the culminating battle of the rebellion" (7).

[15] The relevance of Hayden White's notion of "emplotment" to understand how historical narratives must be reshaped as icons or *mythos* so as to be understandable and explanatory in their account of past events has been recurrently explained in previous chapters. See, e.g. p. 37.

[16] Waswo concurs, in a commentary on *Waverley* oddly reminiscent to the interpretation of Shakespeare's *Richard II* advanced in the second chapter of this study, as he states that "taking as the primary subject of his concern the great transition in the Western world from a feudal, aristocratic society based on principle and personal loyalty to a capitalist, bourgeois society based on expediency and the impersonal rule of law, Scott shows that the institutions human beings set up, they can pull down" (77-78).

(Scott 47); and it is the hero's deluded, romance-mediated apprehension of reality that leads him to join the Jacobite cause and lend his support to the Highland rebels. From the beginning, then, romance is coated with a halo of delusion. An appreciation of romance—and, in the case of Waverley, a *quest* for romance—is depicted as a by-product of "the dissipation of mind incidental to such a desultory course of reading" (Scott 49). The matter of romance is the matter of Waverley's "waking dreams" (49); and yet the explicitly unreal conventions of the genre are employed as "comforting illusions" (Kerr 20) to rewrite and remake historical reality, by "telling a story about history" (20). Kerr elaborates,

> Romance is an instrument of wish-fulfilment in *Waverley*, a form through which the hero can project his desire onto an external world and evade, at least momentarily, the effects of the political struggle which goes on around him. Waverley is not merely transforming the external world on his trip to the Highlands, but reproducing the world of Waverley-Honour, in which courtship and warfare were a source of pleasure which had no consequences in the world outside of the mind, in which action was a figment of his fancy. (32)

The "emplotment" of the 1745 Jacobite uprising into the form of romance in *Waverley* is evident, but it is also exposed as a fakery, which in effect erases the original act of rewriting history, by disclosing the futility of such a purpose. Romance is then "a fictive structure which permit[s] the projection and assimilation of a violent past" (Kerr 36), and as such it is most clearly represented in the novel's most overt symbol of political reconciliation: the painting of Waverley and the defeated Highland chieftain Fergus Mac-Ivor hanging from the walls of the Baron's restored state in the lowlands:

> There was one addition to this fine old apartment, however, which drew tears into the Baron's eyes. It was a large and spirited painting, representing Fergus Mac-Ivor and Waverley in their Highland dress; the scene a wild, rocky, and mountainous pass, down which the clan ere descending in the background. It was taken from a spirited sketch, drawn while they were in Edinburgh by a young man of high genius, and had been painted on a full-length scale by an eminent London artist. Raeburn himself (whose Highland Chiefs do all but walk out of the canvas) could not have done more justice to the subject; and the ardent, fiery, and impetuous character of the unfortunate Chief of Glennaquoich was finely contrasted with the contemplative, fanciful, and enthusiastic expression of his happier friend. Besides this painting hung the arms which Waverley had born in the unfortunate civil war. The whole piece was beheld with admiration, and deeper feelings. (Scott 489)

As Kerr notes, the happy picture is a clear misrepresentation of not only the historical events contained in it, but also of the *fictive* events and of the relationship between both characters as depicted in the novel (19). The picture is then "at a double-remove" (Kerr 19): it misrepresents a previous misrepresentation. As Hogles notes about *The Castle of Otranto*'s fake medievalism, the painting of Waverley and Mac-Ivor—that is, the emblem of the political reconciliation that apparently resolves through an ending of communal regeneration the romance plot in Waverley—is also a "refaking" ("Ghost" 298) of an originally fake romance. As Kerr explains, "what we see through the eyes of the Baron is the past at a double-remove, a painting rendered by an artist in London from a sketch drawn by an artist in Edinburgh. The painting is a picture of a picture, a production of an earlier production which can only allow the viewer a mediated perception of the past" (19). Obviously, the painting stands as the correlative of romance in *Waverley*, that is, of the idealized narrative of the Jacobite rebellion which is portrayed through romance as finalizing in the regenerative political and *mythical* restoration of Tuly-Veolan. Yet in Tuly-Veolan, in the rehabilitated Lowlands, the double fakery of the painting cannot but function as the reminder of the dissolute civilization it falsely recreates. Kerr explains,

> The painting memorialises Fergus for his friends and comrades. But the memorial is only necessary and possible because Fergus, and the social order which he represented, are now dead. The very conditions which have elevated Waverley to the position of a great landholder and which have allowed him and Talbot to restore Tully-Veolan have destroyed Fergus and eradicated the limited political influence of the clans. (20)

Kerr extends the effects of the painting to characterize the entire narrative, arguing that Scott's sentimental narrative in fact quells rebellion by removing the taint of subversion from rebel leaders such as Fergus so that he can be "rendered harmless in the dinner-parlour portrait, depicted as a friend of Edward Waverley, a comrade-in-arms, a fellow wearer of the tartan" (20). Yet such an argument seems inconsistent with the blatant exposure of the fake nature of such a representation. The plot of a romance is employed to re-narrate the historical Jacobite rebellion in *Waverley*, but the mythical land where the adventure-romance takes place is not the eventually-restored state of Tully-Veolan, but the Highlands, overtly depicted as mythical. Yet the Highlands, in the painting that emblematizes the functions of romance in Scott's novel, are represented in

the background of Waverley and Fergus's reconciliation as "a wild, rocky, and mountainous pass" (Scott 489).

The Highlands, and not Tully-Veolan, are the mythical Waste Land in Scott's novel; they represent the primitive, ritualistic social order that should have been reactivated through romance in *Waverley*. As Kerr notes, romance is the genre of desire and the genre of rebellion, the literary mode of the Jacobite movement" (29). But in the end, the culture and society of the Highlands collapses without hope of restoration, and the only form of rehabilitation possible is limited to the fate of the subjugators, and of their double-removed misrepresentations of the past. What remains is the romance of upper middle-class "sentiment" (Hogle "Romance" 119), as in *Otranto*, which justifies through a narrative of partial restoration the social order of Hanoverian England, "with its burgeoning commercial order and pragmatic ethos, quietly ushering in the age of science" (Valente 252). It is a new form of romance detached from the old form that corresponds with a different "symbolic universe" in *Waverley*: "the wild grace of Jacobite Scotland, with its antique social forms and visionary outlook, now passing convulsively into the realm of shadow and illusion" (252). The result is that "all things romantic in *Waverley* partake of pastness or loss" (272) and that, therefore, traditional romance itself is narrated as inherently pessimistic when it "emplots" the historical events of the eighteenth-century, as it configures a plot not of perpetual regeneration, but of irreparable cultural disintegration, representing the lives and society of the highlanders right before they disappear.

THE ENLIGHTENED ROMANCE OF THE LOWLANDS

Georg Lukács's *The Historical Novel*, one of the earliest and most relevant studies of *Waverley*'s negotiations with History and genre, claims that "Scott's works are in no way modern attempts to galvanize the old epic artificially into new life, they are real and genuine novels" (35-36). They are genuine novels, in Lukács's view, as they apply to their historical subject matter "the creative principles of the great English realist writers of the eighteenth century" (62) in order to achieve a quality of "historical authenticity" that Lukács identifies with "the quality of the inner life, the morality, heroism, capacity for sacrifice, steadfastness, etc. peculiar to a given age" (50). This view is certainly cognate with Welsh's statement that the Waverley novels belong to what he defines as "the tradition

of modified romance" (14). This new form of 'modified' romance is categorically characterized as "romance tempered with realism" (Welsh 14); but, tying in Welsh's generic notion of a modified, realistic romance and Lukács's argument about "Scott's extraordinarily realistic presentation of history" (58), it may be hypothesized that realism in the new, modified romance is achieved precisely—at least in the case of *Waverley*—through history; that is, as Welsh argues, in *Waverley*, "history extend[s] the limits of plausible subject matter" (21).

This confluence of history and romance—the dichotomy at the centre of the novel's structure, according to Valente (415)—has been traditionally analyzed in antithetical terms, as setting up two opposing poles in the structure of meaning that is at the core of Scott's novel. Such an interpretation seems arguably justified by Waverley's apparent coming-of-age realization, significantly "in many a winter walk" (Scott 415), when "he felt entitled to say firmly, though perhaps with a sigh, that the romance of his life was ended, and that its real history had now commenced" (415). This moment of self-awareness roughly corresponds with Waverley's renunciation of the Jacobite cause and his return to progressive, enlightened lowland unionism, which seems to extend the romance vs. history dichotomy to the characterization of the hero's adventures in the Highlands against the sentimental narrative that binds him to his future wife, Rose, her father the Baron, and the eventually-rehabilitated lowland state of Tuly-Veolan. The problem with this interpretation, however, resides in the fact that Waverley's return to the lowlands and his politically and socially restorative marriage to Rose do in fact conform to the shape of romance, not history; while the romance-like incursion of the hero in the wild and mysterious Highlands is concerned with rewriting recent historical events. The limits that separate history and romance are therefore blurred for, as mentioned, the Highlands become "romance territory" (Duncan 101) so that the actual cultural history of the territory can be re-encoded, re-named, re-written and re-invented (Makdisi 156), while Waverley's beginning of the "history" of his life is in fact represented through the enactment of a typical romance-like ending of mythical restoration.

Perhaps, rather than a confrontation between history and romance, it would be more useful for a myth-critical apprehension of Scott's novel to distinguish between two variations of romance: the new, enlightened romance that narrates the mythical restoration and domestic triumph of the Lowlands, and the old romance made up primarily of dynastic myths that articulates the dissolution of highland culture. Both

romances are functional in the novel and, crucially, both romances operate correlatively, in the sense that each is in fact a repetition of the other. For indeed both romances might in fact be interpreted as variations of the traditional chivalric romances, and both of them in fact reactivate and reinterpret the Waste Land myth in parallel—yet seemingly opposing—manners. Because, evidently, the romance of the Jacobite uprising is a romance of dynastic restoration that ends tragically: Prince Charles Edward, the rightful heir to the throne, characterized as an ideal knight rather than as a historical figure (Valente 257), is never reinstalled to power, and as a consequence, his kingdom—symbolized specifically in the Highlands—remains a sort of mythical Waste Land. This romance constitutes, in fact, the first explicit reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth as articulating a narrative of degeneration in which the Waste Land is not restored in any sense. Yet this romance is overlaid with a parallel one: the story of Waverley's heroic journey from and back to Tully-Veolan, which concludes with the explicit natural and political regeneration of the lowland state, after being laid waste by war, and which is typically brought about—as in, apparently, *The Tempest* and *The Castle of Otranto*—by the ritualistic force of the politically and dynastically convenient marriage of 'royal children'.

Initially, it may be argued that the restoration of Tully-Veolan cancels out the annihilation of Highland culture once both romances—one "emplotting" historical events, the other capturing the "inner life" of the contemporary, realist novel—are superimposed. In fact, as already explained, critics like Kerr have argued that the happily resolved romance of Waverley's transition into adulthood, rationality and domesticity, insofar as it represents "a victory for rationalism and enlightenment" (Lamont XI), characterize the plight of the Highlands as "the unfortunate, but necessary, defeat and subjugation of an older and less civilized society" (Kerr 21). Yet a deeper analysis of how the mythical structures of romance operate in *Waverley* may favour the argument that, in fact, the romance plot that structures the restoration of the Lowlands through the emblematic happy marriage of the English Waverley and the Scottish Rose does not invalidate or completely overwrite the 'romance of loss' that narrates the defeat of Jacobitism and the irreparable wasting of the Highlands. On the contrary, the romance of the Lowlands replicates, through a process of mythical displacement, the romance of the Highlands, so that in the end, the restorative myths of romance ideology

are revealed, once again, as a self-interested fabrication aimed to legitimize, in this case, the power structure of colonialism in the name of progress.[17]

Waverley, as a young hero eager for adventure, is easily identified with a Perceval-like figure. The absentee father and the prominent role of his uncle in young Waverley's education reinforce the mythical identification, endorsed by Hennelly's analogy between Waverley and Galahad, and the Baron and the Fisher King. Galahad is the Grail Knight in later versions of the Waste Land myth, and as such he represents a *double* of Perceval, different insofar as he succeeds in the mythical quest for the Grail, while Perceval fails. Hennelly's characterization of Waverley as counterpart of Galahad is apparently justified since, towards the end of the novel, Waverley seems to succeed in his quest. Perhaps, both identifications with *both* incarnations of the Grail Knight are on point, as they may stand, symbolically, as origin and end in the process of Waverley's coming of age. His naïveté, his deluded imagination, his family origins and his eagerness for adventure recall the figure of the original Grail Knight in Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval*, and as Perceval in the Fisher King's castle, Waverley is honoured with a banquet at the Baron's estate, during which the most extraordinary occurrence that takes place is the solemn contemplation of a mysterious, blatantly Grail-like talisman: the Blessed Bear of Bradwardine, "a golden goblet of a singular and antique appearance, moulded into the shape of a rampant bear, which the owner regarded with a look of mingled reverence, pride, and delight" (Scott 92). The cup, a "curious relic of the olden time" (92), was modelled for the Baron's ancestor after his deeds serving "the lists in the Holy Land" (93) and "was supposed in old and Catholic times to be invested with certain properties of a mystical and supernatural quality" (93).

This Grail-like cup, which Waverley, like Perceval, is enthralled to see in the estate of his benefactor, gets lost during the course of the narrative and, of course, must be recovered in the process of reconstructing Tuly-Veolan, after the war desolates the Baron's estate. Waverley eventually succeeds in restoring the Baron to health and the ruins of Tully-Veolan to their previous splendour, and that is why critics like Hennelly have identified him with the successful Grail-knight, Galahad. For Waverly manages to heal—and succeed—the Baron, and the final restoration of the Lowlands, celebrated through the marriage of Waverley and Rose, the Baron's daughter, is also symbolized

[17] As it will be explored in depth in the following chapters, this issue is a constant in the subversive representation of legitimizing myths in nineteenth-century British literature, and as such it will centre the discussion about the representation of the Waste Land myth in the second part of this study.

by the return of the Grail-reminiscent mystical cup, the already described "celebrated cup of Saint Duthac, the Blessed Bear of Bradwardine" (Scott 490), to the Baron's possession. Upon the unexpected recovery of the cup, which had been pawned after the spoil of Tuly-Veolan during the battle against the highland supporters of the Jacobite-cause, the Baron immediately suspects magic: "one might almost believe in brownies and fairies" (490), he exclaims, enraptured. But quickly the English Colonel Talbot, a hero of the Hanoverian army, warns him that he "may not suspect Lady Emily for a sorceress, or me for a conjuror, which is no joke in Scotland" (490). Immediately, the hint of a mystical cause behind the highly improbable recovery of the Cup of Saint Duthac is associated with the superstitions of Scotland, and right away it is denied. Instead, Colonel Talbot explains in full detail the 'real' history of how the cup was found again thanks to the good intentions of a set of characters, finally seeking assurance that the value of the cup "is not diminished by having been restored through [his] means" (491). Instead of being procured magically, thanks to the mystical force that the Grail would possess in a traditional romance—and which is no joke in Scotland—the cup is restored to the Baron's possession thanks to the efforts and good will of an English colonel. As in the medieval version of the Grail Legend, the restoration of the Waste Land is linked to the search and recovery of the Grail that was kept, originally, in the Fisher King's castle. But the mysticism behind the romance of restoration is now explicitly denied, and it is instead replaced by a (colonialist) political statement: the restoration of Tuly-Veolan, in the Scottish Lowlands, is made possible thanks to the efforts and the understanding of unionist Englishmen, and so the Baron "proposed a cup of gratitude to Colonel Talbot, and 'The Prosperity of the united Houses of Waverley-Honour and Bradwardine!" (491).

Such is in fact the ending of the novel, only followed by the famous "postscript, which should have been a preface" (491). Yet despite the final toast in celebration of the domestic union, which is of course a synecdoche of the political union between England and Scotland, one may detect certain condescension in the Englishmen's efforts to restore the Baron's picturesque, yet no longer mystical possessions. After all, the only reason why the Cup of Saint Duthac is recovered is because, after Waverley's "tales of old Scottish manners" (490)—which as mentioned are a fake romance-like reconstruction of unattainable history—Talbot's nephew is "seized with a tartan fever" (490). The notion of the re-appropriation of highland culture is recurrent, and such re-appropriation is marked by an emptying-out of meaning by means of which the

colonizing culture manages to strip all traces of mysticism from the colonized. Such a process of demystification is made explicit through the representation of romance myth in the novel—traceable in the similitude between the Baron's cup and the Grail, the Baron as the unfortunate Fisher King of a state laid waste, and the already mentioned analogies of Waverley as naïve Perceval and successful Galahad, at different moments of the narrative—for such representation entails the reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth as a narrative devoid of magic and mysticism, and articulated so as to enforce a political agenda that no longer appears as the social correlative of a preternatural order of the world.

The restoration of Tuly-Veolan consists in the reassembling of its ruins, and thus in spite of operating as the origin and end of the hero's quest, such reconstruction also stands, as Duncan claims, as "a representation, the relation of which to history is of an aesthetically reconstituted past" (91). The inference that follows is that, in Duncan's terms, "this romance revival makes no claim over archetypal origin, but represents itself as a fabric reassembled after ruin" (91). The restoration at the end of the romance functions then—most evidently through the emblem of the painting, already examined—as the corroboration of the *fakery* of the new, modified romance, the main difference of which with regards to *old* romance lies not in the use of history as a subject matter, but in the renunciation of an archetypal origin. Romance is explicitly made malleable; like Tuly-Veolan, it can be pulled down and it can be reconstructed from the ruins. It can be reshaped so as to articulate the dominant discourses of the new ruling classes, but it no longer operates on the ideological presupposition that the myths of romance in fact explain an harmonized conception of the universe from which to draw social norms and ethical axioms so that civilization in fact follows a preternatural order. This preternatural order, reflected in nature and explained through myth, is no longer used as the justification of social order and, instead, the ritualistic force of *old* romance is replaced by what Makdisi defines as "an almost ritualistic passage through the modern economic system of the market" (170). For the restoration of Tuly-Veolan represents, above all, the victory of the modern world over the feudal world (Makdisi 169) and as such it seems to stand as the ideological opposite to *old* romance.

THE OLD ROMANCE OF THE HIGHLANDS

As explained, the deliberate renunciation of mysticism in the representation of the 'lowland romance' seems to convey that the apparent, primarily economical recuperation of the Baron's estate does not bring about a true spiritual rebirth to the community. This argument is reinforced through the mythical representation of Waverley's succession of the Baron, solidified when he marries the latter's daughter. The union of a Waverley and the Baron of Bradwardine's daughter epitomizes the political union between England and Scotland, but it eloquently positions an Englishman as the heir of the lowland state. Such a political stance is fortified by the inadequacy of the succession in mythical terms: Waverley, who is meant to become the Baron's successor through his marriage to Rose—that is, through a dynastic succession that, as explained in previous chapters, displaces the mythical healing of the Fisher King—is wounded and falls sick himself over the course of the narrative. After he joins the Highlanders, Waverley is thrown off (and under) his horse during a battle, and rescued from the battlefield by a group of highland soldiers who carry him to "a small and rudely constructed hovel" (Scott 274), by the side of a brook, at the bottom of a "precipitous glen" (273). He spends over a week confined to his sickbed in a mysterious cabin where "there was no appearance of a floor of any kind; the roof seemed rent in several places; the walls were composed of loose stones and turf, and the thatch of branches of trees" (274); and there is looked after by "an old Highland sibyl" (274). Mystery, romance and fancy certainly pervade the chapter to draw a scene that Duncan conspicuously defines as an "exorcism of the spectre of castration" (72). The hero is archetypically "disoriented and disabled" (72) and he is restored when "women pour forth their natural-magical energies of healing upon [him]" (72). This scene is not cognate with the Waste Land myth. The young hero does not feature as the agent of restoration for the old king's debilitating health; instead, the young hero is portrayed as wounded himself, and a sibyl and a mysterious unidentified young maid restore him to his full capacities. Yet the scene is represented as explicitly mythical in its overt mysticism—which, as Colonel Talbot will later insist, is truly no joke in Scotland—and thus serves to provide a "more accurate picture of Waverley's outlaw career [which] might have shown him—in the thick of it—supine on his sickbed, ignorant of his place or the identities of his guardians" (Duncan 73).

If the image of Waverley "supine on his sickbed" presents a true, accurate picture of his adventures in the Highlands, it may be a stretch to identify him, in mythical terms, with a Maimed King figure, but he is definitely represented—in the light of his future role as the heir of Tuly-Veolan—as a faulty Grail hero: a sick, inadequate successor whose dynastic inheritance cannot bring about a true restoration of the Waste Land, for his replacement of the old Baron of Bradwardine cannot be regarded as the successful displacement of the mythical healing of the Fisher King. For as it will be sufficiently discussed in later chapters, as Joseph Campbell defined it, the task of the Grail knight is to inherit the Fisher King's role without inhering his wound (Campbell *Mythologies* 424),[18] and Waverley has already been mythically represented as sick and injured. Significantly, however, Waverley is represented as sick so as to present a picture of his adventures in the Highlands, which arguably entails the affirmation that his position as restorer of the Lowlands defines him as faulty and inadequate as archetypal successor, because, in fact, the political union symbolized by his marriage to Rose Bradwardine might in fact be restorative for the war-ravaged Lowlands, but it proves to be disastrous for the Highlands.

As Duncan notes, "Scott makes powerful use here of the romance convention of the renewal of a vitiated society by the return from an exotic sojourn" (90) but, as Duncan also observes, one of his models is Prospero's island in *The Tempest* (90), which suggest that the use of romance in the novel "insist[s] upon the fragility of the romance world in this transaction: the hero's return signifies no exchange but a subtle spiritual theft, and the desolation of the world left behind" (90). As Claire Lamont explains, the defeat of Jacobitism and the triumph of enlightenment might have carried Scotland forward into a new era of progress and development, but the contextual reality of Scott's contemporary Britain determined that a romance of progress was in fact, simultaneously, a romance of loss. For after the European wars that followed the French Revolution,

> … people were now more ready to recognize the tragedy implicit in social revolution, and to recognize that for everything gained something might have been lost. Any misgivings a Briton might have felt as he watched the weaker nations of Europe submit to a conqueror—conquering in the name of the most improving principles—prepared him to reconsider the plight of the Highlanders over a half a century earlier. (XII)

[18] See p. 181.

In *Waverley*, the inextricable relationship between the ideal of progress and the cultural desolation of the world colonized in the name of progress is achieved through the opposition of two romances that are in fact two parallel representations of the same story. The economic restoration of the Tully-Veolan, with its emphasis on pragmatism and its denial of mysticism, is a counterpart of the degeneration of the Highlands, which, laid waste after war, occupation and cultural domination, remain a true Waste Land without hope of regeneration. As mentioned, the romance of restoration that concludes in the happy union of England and Scotland through the symbolic marriage of Waverley and Rose is the idealized narrative of the Jacoboite rebellion, that is, the happy, restorative ending which rewrites Highland history so as to colonize "the signifying and productive capacity of its imaginary terrain" (Makdisi 179). Indeed, the story of the restoration of the Lowlands might be regarded as an attempt to reshape in the form of a happy-ending romance of regeneration the story of the Jacobite uprising, but *Waverley* exposes the underlying story of tragic loss and cultural dissolution trough the opposition of a highland romance of decay. This 'romance of decay' is in truth parallel to the successful 'lowland romance', insofar as it narrates the rebellion as justified through a dynastic myth (Kerr 36) that is unalienable from the motif of royal marriage as ritualistically representing social and political regeneration. But while both romances function in parallel, the 'highland romance'—reinterpreting the Waste Land myth insofar as, similarly to the history plays already examined, narrates a community's fight for a restorative return to Eden through the restabilising to power of the rightful monarch—is obviously a romance of degeneration that certifies the irreparable desolation of Highland culture.

The 'highland romance'—thus denominated to emphasize the opposition between Waverley's ill-fated adventures in highland territory and his successful (and restorative) inheritance of Tuly-Veolan, i.e., the 'lowland romance'—is the narrative of the irreparable fall of the royal house of Stuart, which had uninterruptedly reigned over Scotland since the fourteenth century, up until the installation of the Hannover dynasty over the unified throne of England and Scotland in 1714. It is then a story of the dissolution of old, mighty Scotland, notably characterized by Scott in *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* as "a kingdom, once proud and independent" (52), "whose manners and character are daily melting and dissolving into those of her sister and ally" (51-

52).[19] *Waverley* narrates, adopting the shape of romance, that process of "melting and dissolving" of Scotland's manners—and their associated mysticism—into the enlightened and pragmatic way of life of eighteenth-century Britain, and thus what is presented in the foreground as a romance of progress is contrasted against a background the theme of which is national disaster (Muir 146). The hero, initiating a process of dissociation that will reach its paroxysm in the dissociated personality of the modernist individual,[20] is detached from the social transformations narrated through romance; and even as he marries Rose Bradwardine and succeeds the old Baron so as to inherit the restored estate of Tuly-Veolan, his aspirations of heroics and romance in the Highlands are little but an imaginary escapade during which he remains a passive, befuddled, and eventually injured and bedridden spectator.

There is no hope for the regeneration of the wasted Highlands. The 'highland romance' that narrates the dynastic myth of the Stuart dynasty climactically takes the hero to his first meeting with the heroic, knightly, and supposedly legitimate heir Prince Charles Edward, at Holyrood Palace in Edinburgh. The meeting conspicuously takes place in a gallery where the paintings on the walls narrate the genealogical history of the kings of Scotland (Scott 292), which, as Kerr notes, completes a narrative that operates as "the legitimizing strategy employed by the Jacobite leadership" (36). The story of Bonnie Prince Charlie is then a true myth of romance, operating as a legitimizing narrative to justify and fortify a power structure that has been destabilized by the course of historical events. As Kerr explains, "Waverley's perception of the Prince as the rightful heir to the throne of Scotland and England doing battle with the usurper is founded in the same romance plot which gives meaning to the pictures in the gallery" (36), but unavoidably, the legitimizing force of the dynastic myth is only temporary, and ultimately, the dynastic myth is itself colonized, as it is rewritten into the romance of progress that finishes with the social rebirth of the Lowlands. Romance is thus

[19] *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* is a collection of Border ballads compiled by Walter Scott and published in three volumes in 1802 and 1803. These words in the introduction, Muir argued, revealed the writer's "acute concern [with] the inevitable melting and dissolving of Scotland" (139), a loss that was later on romanticized in the Waverley novels (139). In Muir's argument, Scott's characterization of Scotland's "lost kingdom" (139) expresses is "a feeling or urgent unease and apprehension, somewhat akin to (…) Mr. Eliot's 'These fragments I have shored against my ruins" (139). The parallelism that Muir establishes between Scott's portrayal of Scotland's lost kingdom and *The Waste Land*—referencing explicitly the Fisher King's lament for the ruined state of his kingdom at the very end of the poem—gives the impression, in Muir's terms "that Scott can find a real image of Scotland only in the past, and knows that the nation which should have formed both his theme and his living environment as a writer is irremediably melting away around him" (140).

[20] See note 6, p. 190.

reshaped and remade, and consequently revealed as a malleable fiction with no claims to universal truths or unchangeable, timeless transcendence. The dynastic restoration mythically required for the regeneration of the Waste Land—allegedly achievable only through the installation of Prince Charles Edward Stuart to the throne of Britain—is literally rewritten into the unionist narrative that places an Englishman, Waverley, as rightful heir to the old, wasted feudal lordship of Tully-Veolan. The restorative ending, thus, once contrasted with the narrative of loss and dissolution shaped by the 'highland romance', becomes the opposite of what it initially seems; it is revealed as the corroboration of a mythical failure and the condemnation of Scotland's lost kingdom, of Highland culture and of its mystic power, to remain a Waste Land with no hopes for regeneration.

A ROMANCE OF PROGRESS

The dynastic myth narrated through Waverley's unfortunate adventures in the Highlands is, as critics have traditionally argued, emblematized in the character of Flora Mac-Ivor, Fergus's sister, with whom the young protagonist is immediately infatuated.[21] From the start, the dissonance between Waverley's expectations of a regenerative romance and the reality of Flora's tragic, destitute ending are perfectly codified. Upon seeing her, "Edward thought he had never, even in his wildest dreams, imagine a figure of such exquisite and interesting loveliness (…) a fair enchantress of Boiardo or Ariosto, by whose nod the scenery around seemed to have been created, an Eden in the wilderness" (Scott 177). Waverley is correct in identifying the scenery surrounding Flora as a wilderness, but he is quite deluded in attributing to her the mythical restorative powers which he has known in chivalric literature. He believes her—rightfully, insofar as she allegorically represents the romance that narrates the Stuart cause of dynastic reinstallation—capable of bringing about the return to Eden which, as explained, constitutes the thematic core of romance mythology. He believes her capable, like an enchantress in a Renaissance romance, of restoring the wilderness, of regenerating the Waste Land she lives in. But immediately—and to no avail—Flora

[21] See, among others—e.g. Hamilton 603 or Kerr 36—Valente's argument that "Scott establishes Flora's allegorical role, in part, by identifying her with the highland landscape" (253) and, most eloquently, Duncan's claim that "clean of worldly ambition for her own sake, Flora embodies the fierce purity of the Cause at its romance origin, and thus also its tragic 'historical destiny" (83).

tries to convince him that as a Celtic muse she hides "in the mist of the secret and solitary hill" (177), and that to love her—that is, to love Flora, and by extension, to love the highland cause that she embodies—one "must love the barren rock more than the fertile valley, and the solitude of the desert better than the festivity of the hall" (177). As Duncan explains, Waverley believes he understands Flora's meaning at the beginning of the tale, "preferring her of the rugged glen (Flora) over her of the fertile valley and festive hall (Rose)" (83). Only at the end will he understand that "those who woo the Cause will espouse the desolation of history, within which the festive hall is laid waste" (83).

Unequivocally, the mythical space of the Highlands is identified with the barren rock, in opposition to the fertile valley of the Lowlands. The rebirth of the Waste Land is only possible outside the mythical space of the Highlands, which are in turn represented as a mythical Waste Land for which there is hope of regeneration. It is formulated that way from the beginning, and thus Flora explains to Waverley at the end, that "it was impossible it could end otherwise than this" (Scott 469). The terrible ending foreseen as inevitable is the death of Fergus, and the unredeemable nature of his horrifying demise is emphasized by the desecration of his beheaded body and Flora's incestuous, necrophiliac lament: "I shall not have the last miserable consolation of kissing the cold lips of my dear, dear Fergus!" (469). And yet, such miserable ending of the 'highland romance' is immediately followed by the restorative ending of Waverley's wedding and the rebuilding of Tuly-Veolan. Such sudden recovery of the happy ending of romance inevitably feels then too forced and jarring, too artificial. Only when Waverley leaves behind the Highlands and his commitment to the Stuart cause, he begins to experience, "that pleasure which almost all feel who return to a verdant, populous, and highly cultivated country, from scenes of waste desolation, or of solitary and melancholy grandeur" (478). The narrative closes with an apparent return to Eden. But such a return is not brought about by the restoration of the Waste Land; contrarily, Waverley simply leaves behind the "scenes of waste desolation" that remain irreparably waste and desolate. As Lamont notes, "readers know that the background to Waverley's wedding festivities was the terrible aftermath of Culloden[22] (…) and we despise Waverley with his paintings and his furniture. He has done a lot of forgetting, which we

[22] After the battle of Culloden, Fremont-Barnes explains, "the destruction of clan power, but particularly that of their chiefs, combined with forcible evictions and clearances from the Highlands, ended a feudal way of life which stretches back many centuries" (88).

all have to do to go on living, but he has done it too quickly and easily for his character to retain our respect" (92).

The two romances then come together at the end of the novel. The regeneration of the Lowlands through the commercial and economic benefits of the Union is, in fact, inextricable from the tragic ending of the romance of loss that narrates the cultural dissolution of the Highlands. The division between two romances is a useful critical device, but both parts of the narrative constitute one single story, built however upon a series of dualisms so as to articulate its ideological foundations. Makdisi explains:

> Superimposed on this dualistic structure [between Highland and Lowland] is an opposition between the fanciful and the realistic, the wild and the tame, the unknown and the known, the threatening and the reassuring, the turbulent and the level, the violent and the peaceful, the noble and the mundane, the heroic and the quotidian, the youthful and the mature. Other historical, symbolic, and political dualisms are similarly inscribed: feudal against modern; myth against Enlightenment; Jacobite against Hanoverian; revolutionary against counter-revolutionary; Catholic against Protestant; sympathies with France against anti-French sentiment; anti-Unionist against Unionist. (161)

These dualisms separate, at opposite ends of the spectrum, an ideal of romance, associated with the fanciful Highlands, and an ideal of social order, associated with the realistic and mundane, yet prosperous world of the Lowlands. Significantly, almost revolutionarily, social order is no longer legitimized through the old myths of romance. Those myths of romance signify for contemporary Britain "the heritage of a cultural identity that is lost but ethically true, an historically alienated ancestral patriarchy recalled in vision or legend" (Duncan 59); but contextualized within "the progressive, rationalist ethos of a [nineteenth-century] narrative of socialization" (59), such ethically-true ancestral legends are simultaneously characterized as an "egotistical delusion" to be outgrown (59). Such is the modified form of romance that articulates the dominant ideology of nineteenth-century Britain through what will become a Victorian and modern nationalist mythology that will define the condition of being British as "being a British landlord, inhabiting a local feudalism that was the adornment rather than source of wealth and power" (Duncan 55).

As Scott himself writes in the Postscript, "there is no European nation which, within the course of half a century, or little more, has undergone so complete a change as this kingdom of Scotland (…) The gradual influx of wealth, and extension of commerce, have since united to render the present people of Scotland a class of being as

different from their grandfathers as the existing English are from those of Queen Elizabeth's time" (492). But this new "Scotch Britishness" (Duncan 55) is the identity of "a dominant professional class entitled not from the ground but from over it, by purchase" (55). It is then the world already foreseen in the topical relevance of *Richard II*'s England, where the supposedly divine king has been reduced to the role of landlord, and there is no mystical force to be drawn from a land that has been commercialized, leased, sold and wasted.[23] The new social order is no longer founded in mythical allegations of preternatural forces ordaining the universe and dictating social norms and ethical axioms for mankind to distribute power and arbitrate communitarian societies. It offers instead a "counter-revolutionary myth of private restoration" (Duncan 105), the essence of which, despite its renunciation of mysticism, is as traditionalist and politically conservative as the older version, for it seems to give account of a static world in which "social relations are not transformed, save in play or for a time: they resume their place, idealized within the imagination of the property-owner as a function of his privilege" (105). This idealization undoubtedly exploits the old myths of romance, but it "takes the form of the sentimental transformation of economic relations of social power into 'original' domestic relations: the Baron as father of his tenants, [and] Waverley as adoptive Son of Ivor" (105).

But the damage has been done. Social regeneration is understood purely in pragmatic, economic, private and domestic terms, as "fresh English wealth is the romance currency that restores the real historical place, lean and battle-scarred and wily, of old Scotland" (Duncan 98). The structures of romance attempt the legitimization—through idealization—of a social order based on commercial success and pragmatic ethos, but the overt renunciation of mysticism and the annihilation of ancestral archetypes in *Waverley*'s reconfiguration of a traditional romance narrative stands in for the ultimate extrication of private restoration from the cosmological forces that, in medieval romance, harmonized social, spiritual and national life. The ending of the novel can be celebrated in the name of commercial progress and economic development, but financial prosperity and material growth can no longer bring about any sort of mystical or spiritual regeneration for a community that has established order and achieved success through the colonization and cultural annihilation of an old, primitive culture whose myths have been irreparably demystified. In *Waverley*, romance

[23] See pp. 72-73.

articulates a narrative of progress, but the ideal of progress that arbitrates all social relationships in nineteenth-century Britain is dissociated from the meaning of romance. The representation of a malleable, changeable myth devoid of transcendence is now explicit, as it also is the disclosure of the political agenda that underlies the use of myth in enlightened societies, which will be discussed in depth in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 5

VICTORIAN POETRY AND MEDIEVAL ROMANCE: THE VICTORY OF THE WASTE LAND IN ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON'S *IDYLLS OF THE KING*

THE RETURN TO CAMELOT

In 1862, the historian Thomas Arnold claimed that by the term *romantic* poems, "we mean, poems in which heroic subjects are epically treated, after the manner of the old romances of chivalry" (qt. in Cronin 341). Yet soon after that time, the term changed its meaning to designate the literary movement that began in England with the publication of Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*, in 1798, and lasted up until the death of Lord Byron in 1824 (Cronin 341). Even when, due to the subject matter of this study, the instance of literary romanticism examined in the previous chapter is characterized by its similarities with medieval romances of chivalry, as Cronin notes, for the most part "romance was removed from Romanticism" (341), which in fact obscured the connection between romantic poets and their Victorian successors, among whom Alfred, Lord Tennyson stands out insofar as it was him, who, "more than anyone else, was responsible for the introduction of Arthurian romance to the nineteenth century" (343).

As Cronin explains, "the Victorian interest in romance was strengthened by the philosophy of the Pre-Raphaelites" (341), specifically by the second incarnation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, formed in 1856 when William Morris, Edward Burne-

Jones, and Algernon Swinburne, then young students at Oxford, met D. G. Rossetti, the prominent Pre-Raphaelite poet of the first Brotherhood, founded in 1848 (341). The second Brotherhood, as Cronin notes, "located in medieval art a healthful corrective to the ugliness, industrialization, and commercialism of the nineteenth century" (341). Yet even as these poets doubtlessly contributed to the romance revival of the nineteenth century by recovering the matter of medieval romances as a subject matter for poetry, the contrast of opposites implicit in the differentiation between a "healthful" past and the "ugliness" of contemporary England come to illustrate the commonly-held assumption that there was an unbridgeable dissonance between the idealized world of romance and the corrupt contemporary world. Specifically, in 1833 Coleridge had contended, "as to Arthur, you could not by any means make a poem national to Englishmen. What have *we* to do with him?" (qt. Cronin 343).

Yet as it will be argued in this chapter, Tennyson's recovery and reshaping of Arthurian romance in his *Idylls of the King* (1856-9 and 1868-74) is far from escapist, but in fact makes up a "long, dark Arthurian speculation" (Gilbert 876) that gives account of a socially and politically degenerative movement through which contemporary England advances, "forward through fin de siècle hedonism into the fragmentation and alienation of a modernist waste land" (876). The underlying implication of Tennyson's retelling of the downfall of Camelot and King Arthur's reign is thus the inexorableness of a degeneration that can only lead to the social and spiritual Waste Land that, as it will be explored in the third part of this study, literary modernism will certify as the collective state of being and lifeless existence that afflicts the survivors of the First World War. For Tennyson's *Idylls*, in fact, give account of the inevitable doom of an idealized society that is simultaneously far removed and "intimately contemporary" (Cronin 348), as the *Idylls* produce an odd sort of anachronism, "in which a past world and the ruined vestiges of it that have been preserved into the nineteenth century coincide" (348). Thus as McGuire argues, Camelot operates in the poem as both metaphor and metonymy (390). It is an ideal, far-removed society, the literary reincarnation of which accounts for the contemporaneity of the English empire; but it is also "the metonymic origin of that empire" (390), as evidenced by how the identification between Prince Albert and Arthur in the "Dedication" at the beginning of the series of poems establishes that Camelot shares "the essential founding mythology of th[e] empire" (391), prior to the process of

representation that characterizes Tennyson's Camelot as correlative to contemporary England.[24] The "Dedication" begins as follows:

> These to His Memory—since he held them dear,
> Perchance as finding there unconsciously
> Some image of himself—I dedicate,
> I dedicate, I consecrate with tears—
> These Idylls .
> And indeed He seems to me
> Scarce other than my king's ideal knight,
> 'Who reverenced his conscience as his knight;
> Whose glory was, redressing human wrong;
> Who spake no slander, no, nor listen'd to it;
> Who loved one only and who clave to her—'(1-10)

Oddly, even as the death of Prince Albert is easily relatable to the death of King Arthur as eulogized in the *Idylls*, since "The shadow of His loss drew like eclipse, / Darkening the world" ("Dedication" 13-14), the identification of the former with "my king's ideal knight" (7) and the insistence on denoting the Prince's worth as measured through the paradigm of courtly love make the identification between Albert and Arthur strangely ambiguous. In fact, the previous lines seem to establish a simultaneous correspondence between Prince Albert and both King Arthur and Sir Lancelot, who, as the noblest knight of the Round Table, in fact epitomizes the (inherently contradictory) values that, as it will be further on explained, sustain and *condemn* the social ideal of Camelot.[25] The implication, then, is that the "the essential founding mythology of th[e] empire" (McGuire 391), metonymically verified in Britain's mythical past, does not

[24] Jeffrey Jackson summarizes and reassesses Mark Girouard's *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (1981) as an elucidation on how, in fact, "British imperialism [brought about] a resurrection of feudal ideals—the world of Camelot—as an alternative to capitalist milieus" (217). More elaborately, Colin Graham famously explained that "many aspects of national and imperial self-comprehension and self-fashioning are embedded in the [*Idylls*]: the use of myths, the need for a publicly acknowledged ethical, moral or social code, the necessity of heroes and figureheads as symbols of nation or empire, and the existence of an 'other' against which to define, and through which to homogenize, the nation-entity—all are encased within the poem's structures, textuality and narratives" (48).

[25] As I have argued elsewhere, in Malory's romances, Lancelot is explicitly depicted as the most chivalrous of knights, capable of the noblest deeds. But at the same time, he is also proven unworthy of succeeding in the quest of the Holy Grail, as "punishment for the four and twenty years that he had been a sinner" (II 357). Lancelot's worth as a knight is a paradox in itself, as it is measured against inherently contradictory ideals: the knight's valour in combat, his adherence to the code of chivalry, his loyalty to the king, and his devotion to courtly love. As it is well-known, it is the narrative of courtly love, which binds Lancelot to the queen, that "embodies the ennobling nature of the code of chivalry—incarnated in the 'moste noble knyght,' yet traitorous Lancelot— and the ineluctable doom brought about by its inherent contradictions" (Gualberto 169). As Rosenberg elaborates, "the paradox of the adultery of Lancelot and Guinevere is that it not only 'mars' them (and the kingdom) but ultimately ennobles them (and the kingdom), as Tennyson emphasizes by contrast with another adulterous triangle—the guiltless, peculiarly modern and joyless affair of Tristam and Isolt" (23).

only contain the ideals that may justify the power structures it establishes, but also the ideological contradictions that will inevitably lead to its downfall. For as Lancelot recognizes about himself, and as it may be extrapolated so as to characterize the social ideal of Camelot in more general terms:

> … but in me lived a sin
> So strange, of such a kind, that all of pure,
> Noble, and knightly in me twined and clung
> Round that one sin, until the wholesome flower
> And poisonous grew together, each as each,
> Not to be plucked asunder; ("Grail" 769-774)

As it has been sufficiently demonstrated in the field of Arthurian Studies,[26] Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, which functions as Tennyson's main source (Ormod 331), constitutes "a display of chivalry so comprehensive as to contain its own critique of the code" (Barron 148). Indeed, Malory's late-medieval retelling of the Arthurian cycle of the legendary tales, not unlike Tennyson's revision, does not simply depict the set of legitimizing social ideals that give form to romance ideology. On the contrary, both Malory and Tennyson present the stories of Arthurian Britain as the narrative and poetic articulations of a series of contradictions that characterize the ideological conflicts and dissension of their respective times, during which the confrontation of social ideals and social realities could cause but the collapse of such social ideals and, consequently, the exposure of the inherent contradictions and vanities that originally shaped them. As Barron explains, at the time when Malory rewrote the Arthurian cycle,

> Chivalry fascinated the fifteenth century as a historical ideal, but centuries of literary celebration had not resolved its inherent contradictions: the conflict between its absolutism and the principle of *mesure* (balance and moderation), its glorification of the individual, and the social service which was its professed aim. Whatever is continuing value as a personal code its limitations as a political model were as apparent to Malory in the failure of the dynastic dream of Arthurian Britain as in the chaotic nightmare of contemporary England. (148)

Significantly, Barron's claim about fifteenth-century England is easily translatable to nineteenth-century England, since the social transformations beginning to take place in England in the fifteenth century had reached its paroxysm—and thus faced their ineluctable decay—in the nineteenth century. Barron describes the transitory times

[26] See e.g. Barron and Moorman.

between the middle ages and the modern age, the fifteenth century, as "an age whose feudal polity, based on the ownership of land, was being rapidly transformed by the mercantile economy on which it now rested and whose idealization of the mounted knight was contradicted by the increasingly tactical and mechanized nature of war"(148). As it is easily observable, these social transformations have consistently determined the reinterpretation of medieval myths in the post-medieval texts so far analyzed in this study, as these *modern* representations gave account of new forms of social relationships and a of new set of power structures in contemporary societies no longer sustained in the preternatural order and meaning of pre-modern myth. From this point onwards, however, the representations of the Waste Land myth explored will give account not of the collapse of the old world depicted in medieval mythology, but of the collapse of modernity itself; or rather, to borrow Calinescu's useful distinction between "the two modernities" (41), of the collapse of historical modernity as represented in *aesthetic* modernity.

THE HOLLOWNESS OF MYTH

As Calinescu hypothesizes, "at some point during the first half of the nineteenth century an irreversible split occurred between modernity as a stage in the history of Western civilization—a product of scientific and technological progress, of the industrial revolution, of the sweeping economic and social changes brought about by capitalism—and modernity as an aesthetic concept" (41). As it is obvious, the social transformations listed by Barron, beginning to occur in the fifteenth century, are in fact the social, political and economic changes that characterize the traditionally-considered 'third era' of Western history: modernity, dating from the early Renaissance (Calinescu 20).[27] This 'historical modernity,' as Calinescu notes, continued the traditions of early-Renaissance modernity and, as such, is best characterized by "the doctrine of progress, the

[27] In Calinescu's words: "It has been convincingly demonstrated that the division of Western history into three eras—antiquity, Middle Ages, and modernity—dates from the early Renaissance (…) Classical antiquity came to be associated with resplendent Light, the Middle Ages became the nocturnal and oblivious 'Dark Ages,' while modernity was conceived of as a time of emergence from darkness, a time of awakening and 'renascence,' heralding a luminous future. (20) That is to say, modernity seemed to represent a return to Eden that was however challenged in its literature, which as argued throughout this study, has recurrently challenged the assumption of progress inherent to the dominant ideology of modernity by subverting the strategies of legitimation contained in the myths reused and re-appropriated by the culture of this 'third era'.

confidence in the beneficial possibilities of science and technology, the concern with time (…), the cult of reason, and the ideal of freedom defined within the framework of an abstract humanism, but also the orientation toward pragmatism and the cult of action and success" (41). 'Cultural modernity', per contra, is defined by its "consuming negative passion" (42) and its disgust for the middle-class values celebrated in the modern age. In the history of ideas, this 'cultural modernity' is perhaps best explained as generating in the philosophy of nineteenth-century thinkers such as Nietzsche, Marx, Simmel, Webber or Baudelaire (Rampley 2), who considered themselves as witnesses of a "decisive phase in the development of European culture" (2). Such a phase is what Calinescu defines as "cultural modernity" (42), which for Nietzche arguably constitutes "a decisive moment in the history of western culture, when its values are revealed to be hollow illusions and thereby lose all legitimacy" (Rampley 2). As it can be observed, the exposure of the hollowness and illegitimacy of mythological discourse has been a constant in the myth-critical reading carried out up until now in this study; from the nineteenth-century onwards, however, such hollowness of myth, and the loss of its claims of legitimacy become more and more explicitly associated with the groundlessness of modern values, and for that reason, Nietzsche's formulation of the plight of cultural modernity as signalled by 'the death of God' (Owen 54) is particularly relevant for this study. Rampley explains:

> …whereas writers such as Karl Marx, Georg Simmel, Max Weber or Charles Baudelaire located this process [of development in nineteenth-century European culture] in changes in the material conditions of contemporary urban society, Nietzsche consistently held to the view that the crisis of modernity was largely one of values, one moreover generated by the internal logical of western cultural values, in particular in persistent belief in metaphysical certitude. (2)

Nietzsche first writes about the death of God in *The Gay Science* (1882), and the idea is stated as follows:

> God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.
> How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed;

> and whoever is born after us—for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto. (*Gay Science* 181)

Postmodern philosopher Giani Vattimo explains this death of God, as formulated by Nietzsche, in anthropological terms that are very easy to relate to mythological thought. Through Vattimo's elucidation, the God whose death has been validated by Nietzsche is the God that the primitive man sought as the cause to everything and every natural event (Caputo and Vattimo 89). It is also the God from whom mankind derived a set of rules to order the life in society that may guarantee mankind's security in the world (89). It is clearly the (dead) god of mythology, made unnecessary in the modern world after the preternatural meaning and order of myth have been replaced by the achievements of civilization and the discoveries of science and technology. But in a less literal sense, Vattimo also explains the death of God in philosophical terms that will be revisited later on in this study, in chapters dedicated to examining the (literary) postmodern representations of medieval mythology.[28] In these philosophical terms, the death of God comes to signify "the end of metaphysics and the end of truth" (92). In fact, the process of mythical representation that effectively gives account of the end of truth—explicitly in post-modernist literature—begins in the texts that, like Tennyson's *Idylls* (at an early stage in this process), represent the ambivalent and conflicting ideology of 'cultural modernity'. It is the phase in European culture when it is revealed that the values of 'historical modernity', sustained through a belief in metaphysical certainty, are in truth hollow and, as the myths that have articulated those values throughout the centuries, lay no claim to legitimacy.

THE KING AMONG THE DEAD

As Ormond notes, the overall theme of the *Idylls* is disintegration (335), and maybe for that reason Rosenberg defined the poems as "Tennyson's doom-laden prophecy of the fall of the West" (1).[29] If, as Saunders claims, romance is a literary mode that, traditionally, "leads from a state of order through darkness, winter, and death, to rebirth,

[28] Specifically in chapters 14 and 15.
[29] Brashear agrees that "Tennyson's theme, if we can call it a theme, is doom, the King's doom, and from the outset an atmosphere of foreboding engulfs the *Idylls*" (39).

new order, and maturity" (3),[30] Tennyson's actualization of chivalric romance reverts that movement rather explicitly. In Rosenberg's words, "*Idylls of the King* is precisely such a journey through the dark night, ending on the uninhabited verge of the world, where Arthur's kingdom meets its apocalyptic doom in the 'last, dim, weird battle of the west'" (5-6). If, as Frye argued, the narratives of romance always recount "the victory of fertility over the waste land" (*Anatomy* 193),[31] the epic of the *Idylls* leads towards a final Waste Land that ominously foreshadows the Waste Land of Eliot's post-war elegy. For the *Idylls* conclude in a battle fought "on the waste sand by the waste sea" ("Passing" 93), in which:

> A deathwhite mist slept over sand and sea:
> Whereof the chill, to him who breathed it, drew
> Down with his blood, till all his heart was cold
> With formless fear; and ev'n on Arthur fell
> Confusion, since he saw not whom he fought.
> For friend and foe were shadows in the mist,
> And friend slew friend not knowing whom he slew;
> And some had visions out of golden youth,
> And some beheld the faces of old ghosts. (96-103)

This "battle of the west" is certainly "dim" and "weird" (95). It is fought under a "*deathwhite* mist," where confounded soldiers cannot tell friend from foe. This depiction of the final battle, which results in the passing of Arthur and the downfall of Camelot, seems thus insistent on subverting the glorification of heroic mounted knights ridding triumphantly into battle that recurs in traditional romances of chivalry:

> Oaths, insult, filth, and monstrous blasphemies,
> Sweat, writhings, anguish, labouring of the lungs
> In that close mist, and cryings for the light,
> Moans of the dying, and *voices of the dead*.
> Last, as by some one deathbed after wail
> Of suffering, silence follows, or thro' death
> Or deathlike swoon, thus over all that shore,
> Save for some whisper of the seething seas,
> *A dead hush fell*; but when the dolorous day
> Grew drearier toward twilight falling, came
> A bitter wind, clear from the North, and blew
> The mist aside, and with that wind the tide
> Rose, and the pale King glanced across the field

[30] See p. 82.
[31] See p. 88.

Of battle: but *no man was moving there*;
Nor any cry of Christian heard thereon,
Nor yet of heathen; only the wan wave
Brake in *among dead faces*, to and fro. (116-130)

Rosenberg argues that Tennyson was a symbolist half a century before the Symbolist Movement became popular (2) and, regardless of whether such a claim can be verified,[32] it seems certain that the previously quoted lines, depicting the war-ravaged "waste" sands as a mist-covered battlefield peopled by ghosts and dead faces, where, in a winter morning, the hushed voices of the dead can be heard, somehow prophesizes Eliot's winter morning in the "unreal city," in *The Waste Land*; that is, a post-symbolist symbolization of the modem, post-war city as the counterpart of the Arthurian Waste Land.[33] In this sense, in so far as the desolation of the "battle of the west" in Tennyson preludes the desolation of Eliot's post-war London, it may be argued that, as Rosenberg claims, the *Idylls* are "in the profoundest sense a prophesy" (6) of the catastrophe of the First World War, which came to certify that, in fact, "the seemingly rock-solid values of the Victorians had proved as ephemeral as Camelot itself" (6).

Such is the subject matter of the *Idylls of the King*: the groundlessness of Victorian ethics as the epitome of social order, civilization and progress, symbolized through a metaphoric identification with Camelot which, insofar as both ideals of civilization are sustained by similar ideologies, operates simultaneously as metonymy of the Victorian culture, the degeneration of which is narrated throughout the poem. For as mentioned, the *Idylls* do not close with a moment of regenerative triumph as it was to be expected from the romances they contain—not even a *fake* moment of regeneration that does not correspond with the spiritual redemption of the community, as in the texts previously examined. In the *Idylls*, for the first time in the literary tradition explored throughout this study, the resolution of the romance plot is distinctly degenerative. For at the end, the cuckold, childless and effeminate Arthur is, at last, explicitly identified with the Fisher King, as he suffers a "grievous wound" ("Passing" 432) in battle, and,

[32] Rather convincingly, Rosenberg quotes a moment in "The Marriage of Geraint" in which Camelot is explicitly portrayed as a "city of the imagination" (Rosenberg 2) (strikingly similar to Yeats's visionary kingdom of Byzantium), when the lady Enid experiences a symbolist dreamlike vision: "And [she] dreamt herself was such a faded form / Among her burnished sisters of the pool; / But this was in the garden of a king; / And though she lay dark in the pool, she knew / That all was bright; that all about were birds / Of sunny plume in gilded trellis-work; / That all the turf was rich in plots that looked / Each like a garnet or a turkis in it; / And lords and ladies of the high court went / In silver tissue talking things of state" ("Marriage" 654-663).
[33] See p. 179, note 64; and p. 217, note 38.

incapable of moving, needs to be carried "thro' the place of tombs" (343).[34] Before he is deadly injured, as he contemplates the desolation caused by the "dim, weird" battle of the west, he realizes in a moment of self-awareness: "Behold, I seem but King among the dead" (146). At that time King Arthur has become the King of the Waste Land, for he is the irreparably injured, childless king of a desolate kingdom for which there is no hope of restoration. The movement of romance is clearly reverted: the initial conflict—the wounding of the king and the subsequent wasting of his kingdom—that must be resolved through the heroic Grail quest is displaced, and becomes instead the fatal resolution of the story.[35]

Eloquently, in the poem "Balin and Balan," Tennyson avoids having Balin maim King Pellam by delivering the 'dolorous stroke' with Longinus's spear. As already explained, this is the episode that narrates in Malory's Book II the wounding of the Maimed King, who must be healed by means of the Grail Quest. In Malory, the wasting of the land follows the wounding of King Pellam, when Balin "rode forth through the fair countries and cities, and found the people dead, slain on every side. And all that were alive cried, 'O Balin, thou hast caused great damage in these countries; for the dolorous stroke though gavest unto King Pellam, three countries are destroyed'" (Malory I 84). In Tennyson, Balin steals the magical spear that should have wounded King Pellam, who consequently functions as the non-maimed Maimed King of the *Idylls*; and later, even more eloquently, both King Pellam and his son (and double), King Pelles—who are portrayed as Maimed Kings in Malory's retelling of the Holy Grail Quest[36]—are completely erased from Tennyson's idyll "The Holy Grail." The role

[34] MacHann offers a comprehensive commentary on Tennyson's hostile criticism—from his contemporaries to T.S. Eliot—with regards to his portrayal of Arthur's questionable 'manhood' (199). As Gilbert had noted in her seminal study on gender and the *Idylls*, "most readers of the *Idylls of the King* find themselves wondering by what remarkable transformative process the traditionally virile and manly King Arthur of legend and romance evolved, during the nineteenth century, into the restrained, almost maidenly Victorian monarch of Alfred Lord Tennyson's most ambitious work" (863). For the earliest readers, Gilbert argued, such transformation was "disquieting" as it seemed to account for the "growing domestication and even feminization of the age" (863). Shires argued similarly, by hypothesizing that Tennyson's transformation of Malory's "manly king" in fact embodies the inherent contradictions of Victorian patriarchy: "Tennyson sees that to be a Victorian patriarch is to be a castrated male. And a castrated patriarch in a phallocentric order is a contradictory state of affairs. Yet, the Victorian patriarch 'in reality' was a castrated male yearning to be otherwise" (412).

[35] Even though not as a direct reference to the Waste Land myth, Tennyson had already prefigured this degenerative movement of romance in "The Lady of Shalott" (1842). The semantic cadence of this poem moves from "a song that echoes cheerly" (Tennyson *Works* 43 l30) to the Lady's tragic fate, when "singing in her song she died" (47 l152). Towards the ending, the poem reads: "A gleaming shape she floated by, / Dead-pale between the houses hight, / *Silent* into Camelot (...) And in the lighted palace near / Died the sound of royal cheer" (47 ll156-158, 164-165my italics).

[36] See introduction, p. 14.

of Maimed King is transferred from King Pellam to King Arthur, and thus the wasting of the land does not affect King Pellam's kingdom exclusively, but becomes instead the fate of Camelot as a whole. The ideal of chivalry and superior civilization is then represented as counterpart to the mythical Waste Land but, insofar as the movement of romance is reversed, and the narrative does not lead from darkness and desolation to springtime and rebirth, but instead takes the reader to the final wasting of Camelot, there is no hope for restoration when "the new sun r[ises] bringing the new year" ("Passing" 469), for in the "darkness of that battle in the West" is "where all of high and holy dies away" ("To the Queen" 65-66).[37] But as Rosenberg explains, Tennyson turns to the legendary Camelot in the same way that Shakespeare turns to "the blasted heats of ancient Britain" (12) in *King Lear*: to create "as Waste Land at least as contemporary as T.S. Eliot's" (12), for in fact Eliot's modern-day Waste Land derives, at least in part, from the blighted land of sand and thorns in Tennyson's "The Holy Grail" (12), which is itself as immediate (for it is a continuation) of "the aboriginal wastes of the warring heathen" (12) that precede the coming of Arthur in Tennyson's first idyll.

THE WASTE LAND OF SAND AND THORNS

The leitmotif that recurs in Percivale's narration of the Grail Quest—"fell into dust…/… in a land of sand and thorns" ("Grail" 389-390, 419-420)—echoes in the sand, rock and dust that characterize the desolate desert landscape threaded by the dissociated Grail Knight of *The Waste Land*.[38] Because as in Eliot's poem, in

[37] The dissonance between the ever-recurrent rebirth of the natural world, as eternally brought about by the cyclical time of the seasons, and the impossibility of a social and spiritual regeneration for the modern individual and the society he lives in becomes, from this point onwards—and with the possible exception of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, in which time itself is portrayed as degenerative, as it will be analysed in the following chapter—a constant in the representation of the Waste Land myth in the literary avant-guard of 'cultural modernity', as explicitly demonstrated in the famous first lines of *The Waste Land* (see p. 192) and the title and epigraphs of Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (see p. 290). In *Idylls of the King*, however, a certain degree of correspondence between natural time and social decay and rebirth remains functional, as the poems articulate the simultaneity of cyclical and apocalyptic time. Structurally, the *Idylls* are linked to the seasons, but the progression from spring to winter, far from conveying a sense of eternal renewal, "transposes the dominant mode of Arthurian myth from romance to tragedy, in which the only release from time is death" (Rosenberg 28). After all, as Rosenberg himself notes, the *Idylls* begin with a wedding and close with a funeral (9).

[38] As described in "What the Thunder Said": "Here is no water but only rock / Rock and no water and the sandy road. / The road winding above among the mountains / Which are mountains of rock without water. / If there were water we should stop and drink / Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think. / Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand / If there were only water amongst the rock" (Eliot *TWL* 331-338).

Tennyson's *Idylls*, the Waste Land is not just the blighted kingdom governed by the Fisher King, but the whole land through which the Grail Knight must travel to complete a quest that cannot ever be accomplished by a knight whose dissociated consciousness is scattered through the poem. Significantly, Tennyson does give a seemingly coherent voice to this failed knight. In "The Holy Grail," Percivale is given the narrative authority to tell the story of the Grail in an anomalous idyll in which, as Bonney notes, "the narrator, Percivale, and the narratee, Ambrosius, are the only characters" (249). With the exception of Ambrosius, the speech of all the other characters (the nun, the hermit, the wise man, etc.) is Percivale's fabrication (249), so that the story of the Grail is configured as a tale within a tale, that is, as Percivale's unreliable narration, which, as Bonney argues, is faulted because Percivale is compelled "to decompose ambiguous configurations of human experience into judgmentally opposed binary components, whereupon one is granted supernatural enhancement while the other is demeaned and suppressed" (249). That is to say, within Percivale's narration, events are recurrently categorized in the basis of a binary opposition between the mundane and the (apparently) supernatural, which in fact determines the failure or success of the quest. Percivale's tale thus functions within the parameters of mythopoetic thought, as it is sustained on a binary classification of reality;[39] yet his tale holds no claim to legitimacy, as it is presented as an unreliable narrator's biased and subjective perception of himself and of his own story.

Thus Percivale claims to have left Camelot for "the cowl/ (…) in an abbey far away" ("Grail 5-6), because the vision of the Holy Grail drove him away from the vanities of Arthurian society: "all vainglories, rivalries, / And earthly heats that spring and sparkle out / Among us in the jousts, while women watch / Who wins, who falls; and waste the spiritual strength / Within us" (32-36). The judgement of chivalric practices as a waste of spiritual strength is definitely a valuable commentary on the decadence of Camelot as an idealized society, but as Perceval himself admits in his tale, he is accused, at the end of the quest, of "hav[ing] driven men mad" and "made [the] mightiest madder than [the] least" (859-860) by convincing them to seek the Holy Grail. Such is then the end result of the Holy Quest, during which Percivale traverses "[the] land of sand and thorns" and fails to see the Grail, for he does not lose himself to save himself (456). After finding a "ruinous city" (429) and hallucinating "one man of an

[39] See p. 315.

exceeding age" (431) that might have been the Maimed King, hadn't he fallen into dust when trying to speak to Percivale, he realizes: "Lo, if I find the Holy Grail itself / And touch it, it will crumble into dust" (438-439). Percivale's apprehension of reality is hence depicted—by himself—as hallucinatory, and as such it encompasses his fictive fabrication of the Grail, "the Holy Cup of healing" (652) which, while it bode in Glastonbury, where Joseph of Arimathea had carried it "from the blessed land of Aromat" (48), "if a man / Could touch or see it, he was healed at once, / By faith, of all his ills" (54-56). But in the times of Arthur—that is, in the times that supposedly function as the idealized past in which Victorian England could find a mirror—the Grail had disappeared, because, "the times / Grew to such evil" (56-57). Now the contemplation of the Grail is retold as a maddened hallucination, and the consequence of the Holy Quest is that "most of them [who] follow[ed] wandering fires, / [were] lost in the quagmire" (887-888), and so King Arthur is left "gazing at a barren board" (889).

Once again, the actions that should have relieved the Maimed King and restored the Waste Land become the source of a social and spiritual plight that can no longer be redeemed, for the noble deeds of the knights and the mysticism of the Grail that function in the medieval myth as a source of redemption are redefined as a collective and somehow contagious delusion. The meaning of the quest—that is, the meaning of the myth—has been dissociated from its representation. King Arthur explains why he refused to participate in the quest:

> And some among you held, that if the King
> Had seen the sight he would have sworn the vow:
> Not easily, seeing that the King must guard
> That which he rules, and is but as the hind
> To whom a space of land is given to plow.
> Who may not wander from the allotted field
> Before his work be done; (899-905)

The words contain, rather explicitly, the ideological foundation of the Waste Land myth: the inextricable sympathetic connection between the King and his kingdom explained in agricultural terms as a metaphor for the King's responsibility to the realm.[40] As explained, and as supported by these lines, Arthur operates as Maimed King

[40] These lines in fact explain the necessity of preserving an *illusion* of monarchy that may sustain the social order, as it will be explained later on. Ironically, and rather tragically, Arthur's knights renounce to that illusion precisely for choosing to pursue the Grail, which seals the doom of Camelot and of the idealizations that sustain its social and ethical order.

in the *Idylls*, and as such his task is to ensure the prosperity of his land which, far from being redeemed by the Grail Quest, has been condemned by it. Because the quest has revealed, at least to Percivale, the vanities of Camelot which supposedly were meant to embody and arbitrate the social ideals of peace, nobility and ordered civilization that sustained Arthurian society, and by extension lay at the core of Arthurian mythology. But it has also revealed—through Lancelot's failure—the inextricable dual nature of knighthood as noble and sinful, and thus it has turned the Table Round into a "barren board" (230), a synecdoche of the mythical Waste Land that cannot be redeemed, for at the end of the Holy Quest "the land of sand and thorns" has spread to *infest* the whole of Camelot. As Percivale describes,

> O, when we reach'd
> The city, our horses stumbling as they trode
> On heaps of ruin, hornless unicorns,
> Crack'd basilisks, and splinter'd cockatrices,
> And shatter'd talbots, which had left the stones
> Raw, that they fell from, brought us to the hall.
> And there sat Arthur on the daïs-throne,
> And those that had gone out upon the Quest,
> Wasted and worn, and but a tithe of them. (712-720)

As Rosenberg argued, "the knights' quest for the Grail proves equally fatal, but the disaster is social as well as individual. The wasteland of sand and thorn through which the knights 'follow wandering fires' symbolizes the spiritual infertility of the realm, and the half-ruined Camelot to which only a remnant returns has already begun to lapse back into the wilderness" (58). Time is then configured as cyclical, yet ineluctably degenerative: as Rosenberg argued, Rome yields to the barbarians, who are in turn subdued by Arthur, who eventually yields to the chaos that follows the downfall of Camelot (37). The repetitive structure that initially suggests perpetual renewal in fact implies the opposite, since, as Rosenberg describes, "the order that replaces Arthur is even more barbarous than the one he displaced" (37). Each repetition of a cycle of (apparent) renewal brings about, in truth, a deeper plunge into chaos, and thus Arthur's ideal reign is but a brief relief for a kingdom doomed to a fate worse than the plight it once endured.[41] There is no illusion of progress anymore. "Ere Arthur came" ("Coming" 5), Cameliard was ruled by "many a petty king (…) / (…) [who] ever

[41] See note 37 to this chapter.

waging war / Each upon other, wasted all the land" (5-7). Meaningfully, as he battles for his installation to the throne, Arthur realizes that in order to "save" the Waste Land—"O earth that soundest hollow under me, / Vext with waste dreams?" (83-84)—he needs to marry Guinevere, because without her, he feels:

> [I] cannot will my will, nor work my work
> Wholly, nor make myself in mine own realm
> Victor and lord. But were I joined with her,
> Then might we live together as one life,
> And reigning with one will in everything
> *Have power on this dark land to lighten it,*
> *And power on this dead world to make it live*. (87-93, my italics)

The characterization of King Arthur as Maimed-King figure is codified thus from the first idyll, as it is made explicit that the regeneration of the "dead" land depends on his generative sexuality, which may only be successful through his marriage to Guinevere. The irony is striking, as the same oath is sworn—a promise of a "deathless love" (131, 465, respectively)—to seal the King's union to both, Lancelot and Guinevere. Because readers know that the supposedly "deathless," life-giving love between the king and his queen is in fact death*ful*, as the courtly love between Lancelot and Guinevere is instrumental in the political downfall of Camelot. Arthur's hopes for a generative sexuality through his marriage to Guinevere, which would bestow "[the] power on this dead world to make it live," are then clearly exposed, from the start, as an empty promise, and thus, as Gilbert argues, "the coming of Arthur at the beginning of the Idylls is plainly an apocalyptic event, recognized as such by the whole society" (867). If the restoration of the wasted land of Cameliard is pending on the King's union to Guinevere, and such union is known to be both barren and ultimately deleterious for the maintenance of the social and political structures that sustain the idealized Camelot, it may easily be argued that King Arthur does in fact function as the Maimed King of the *Idylls*, and hence as a double of King Pellam, the literal Maimed King who is actually *not* maimed in Tennyson's retelling of his story.

Gilbert claims that "as the country of King Pellam is the land of the spear, so Arthur's Camelot is the court of the Grail" (870). According to this argument, "death-dealing, Roman, phallic, linear, the spear—its ghostly shadow haunting the countryside—symbolizes the desiccated male society of Pellam's court" (870), while the Grail functions as a "familiar symbol both of nature and of the female, a womblike

emblem of fecundity associated with what, in pagan legend, is the Cauldron of Plenty, an attribute of the Goddess of Fertility" (870). In this view, the spear—which is stolen and thus not used to maim King Pellam—represents wasted, ineffective masculine sexual power, while the Grail stands in as a timeless form of uterine, female sexuality. But in truth both emblems of sexuality are represented as equally unproductive and fruitless, for the uterine symbolism of the Grail—which, as explained, only features as a hallucinatory vision, surely fated to fade into dust, in Percivale's untrustworthy tale—is meaningless by itself, for feminine sexuality cannot be fertile unless combined with the generative power of masculine sexuality, which is erased through the mythical reinterpretation of King Arthur as a Maimed-King figure. As Gilbert notes, in Tennyson's retelling of the Arthurian legends, Modred—who eventually kills Arthur and completes the doom of Camelot—is not presented as Arthur's (illegitimate (and inbred)) son. In Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, King Arthur has no children at all. In mythical terms then, and also as Gilbert argues, "it is precisely Arthur's incapacity to propagate his line that renders his new society so vulnerable" (872). For in Tennyson's poems, King Arthur is to all extends a *mythical* embodiment; that is to say, he is an embodiment *of myth* and thus the mythical form his character adopts—that of the Maimed King—is crucial to understanding how Arthur's embodiment of myth in fact updates the Arthurian canon to articulate a romance about contemporary England.

THE CHARMED SPECTACLE OF MONARCHY

As Mallen argues, Tennyson's *Idylls* reflect "the lost reality of monarchical power in post-Reform England" (275), and therefore reveal the political fiction elucidated by Walter Bahegot's *The English Constitution*, an influential examination of British Government after the First Reform Act of 1832.[42] Like Bagehot, Mallen writes,

[42] The Reform Act of 1832 was an Act of Parliament that brought about significant changes to the British electoral system, which effectively limited the power of the Crown. The Whigs sponsored this reformed as an strategy to 'reform in order to preserve'; as Whitfield explains, "their objectives were to give the vote to new interest groups, to purge the system of some of its worst abusers (...) and to give extra representation to the counties in order to strengthen the independence of the House of Commons against the Crown" (72). The £10-householder franchise and the abolition of the 'potwalloper' and 'scot and lot' franchises (73) determined that while the reform "enfranchised the majority of the middle class" (Evans 57), there were actually fewer working-class men that could vote after 1832 than before (Whitfield 73). Yet whether the reform initiated the political transformation towards democracy or, contrarily, invited "the shopocrats of the enfranchised towns to join the Whigocrats of the country, and make common cause

"Tennyson recognized the need to maintain a 'charmed spectacle' of monarchy, but unlike Bagehot, he sought to use the *mythicizing* 'word' of the poet laureate to *underwrite* this noble lie and to bring it more into the open" (275, my italics). For Bagehot, this "charmed spectacle of monarchy" is a "theatrical show" (Bagehot 31) to which the mass of the English people yield their deference, by imagining that "the higher world, as it looks from without, is a stage on which the actors walk their parts much better than the spectators can" (31). In that theatrical show perceived by the English masses, "the climax of the play is the Queen" (31), and "by the spectacle of this august society, countless ignorant men and women are induced to obey the few nominal electors (…) who have nothing imposing about them" (31). As Mallen explains, interpreting Bahegot, the masses mistake the pomp and circumstance of royalty for actual political power (275) and thus a distinction is established between the "apparent rulers" and the "real rulers". Bagehot explains:

> The apparent rulers of the English nation are like the most imposing personages of a splendid precession: it is by them the mob are influenced; it is they whom the spectators cheer. The real rulers are secreted in second-rate carriages; no one cares for them or asks about them, but they are obeyed implicitly and unconsciously by reason of the splendour of those who eclipsed and preceded them. (31)

In this view, more acutely after the Reform Act of 1832, the monarch is not a real ruler, but an apparent one. And as such Tennyson characterizes King Arthur in his *Idylls*: "a purely symbolic sovereign who commands only the collective imagination of the people" (Mallen 275). King Arthur is thus the embodiment of a political fiction that is socially accepted and that Mallen identifies with the already-examined rhetoric of the king's two bodies, a "legal *fiction*," Mallen writes, which "had deeply permeated the English consciousness, appearing especially in Renaissance literature, including Shakespeare, and persisting in the folk mind through the saying, 'The king is dead; long live the king' (277).[43] The medieval doctrine of the king's two bodies and its subversive representation in early modern drama through a process of mythical reinterpretation has

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with them in keeping down the people, and thereby quell the rising spirit of democracy in England" (Hetherington, qt. in Evans 58), it did limit the executive power of the monarch. After the bill passed in 1832, "no longer could the monarch sustain ministers in office through patronage, nor could the monarch ensure that his or her government won a general election. Public opinion and party were increasingly what mattered after 1832 and the monarch was obliged to withdraw from active involvement in the choice of ministers" (Whitfield 80).

[43] As Mallen notes, the doctrine of the king's two bodies fascinated several contemporary jurists of Tennyson's times, and thus featured prominently in relevant works at the time such Maitland and Pollock's *The History of English Law* (277).

been explored in depth in the first part of this study,[44] yet what is most striking about this "fiction that the king is 'a corporation sole'" (Mallen 277), as it arguably features in *Idylls of the King*,[45] is how it directly confronts the "increasing fictionality of the monarch's authority" in Victorian England (Mallen 277). For at the time England had become a "disguised republic" (Bagehot 185) and thus the monarch can no longer be perceived (or represented) as the head of the state, but is instead presented as a *figurehead* (Mallen 280), a known fiction that, like myth, is socially accepted because it warrants and preserves social order. King Arthur in the *Idylls* is thus a poetic embodiment of the theatricality of monarchy in Victorian England, so to speak; and as such he is also an embodiment of myth itself—or rather, of mythopoetic thought—because King Arthur's kingly power "sustains for a time the illusion of civilization (Camelot) above the Dionysian chaos and delays the regression into bestiality" (Brashear 29).[46]

Brashear's Nietzschean interpretation of *Idylls of the King* is rather eloquent so as to explain how Tennyson's poems expose the "dysfunctional ideology" (MacHann 216) of Camelot in the *Idylls*, and by extension of Victorian England, as being founded on an easily disassembled mythology. For as Brashear argues, King Arthur and Camelot epitomize "the necessity of creating grand and heroic illusions, what Nietzsche calls Apollonian illusions, of value and meaning, and wilfully adhering to them, in order to sustain the self against the overwhelming Dionysiac despair" (30). Explicitly, Nietzsche identifies the "Apolline illusion" (*Tragedy* 102) with "the tragic myth and the tragic hero" (101); for as he explains, "if we felt as purely Dionysiac beings, then myth, as symbol, would simply be left on one side, unaffecting and unregarded, and would not distract us for even a moment from listening to the echoes of the *universalia ante rem*"

[44] See p. 42 and ff.

[45] Mallen argues that King Arthur is in fact represented in *Idylls of the King* as being both human and mystical, mortal and eternal (278); such a claim is undoubtedly true but hardly noteworthy, as King Arthur is to all extents a legendary king of medieval romance and as such he can only be represented as mystical. Yet, what is arguably more relevant, and as such it will be described, is that the divine representation of King Arthur in the *Idylls*, as already explained, is not so much that of the legendary hero king of the Arthurian cycle, as much as counterpart of the ill-fated Maimed King of the romances.

[46] As it will be further on argued in later chapters, King Arthur's eventual transformation into a Maimed-King figure in fact implies *his* succumbing to the disturbing (and self-shattering) forces of a Dionysian knowledge of life, for according to mythologist Joseph Campbell, the condition that afflicts the Maimed King can in fact be identified with Nietzsche's formulation of the 'Hamlet's condition'. In this view, Percival's question is "at root the same as Hamlet's 'to be or not to be'" (Campbell *Mythologies* 424), and the answer to both questions is "the primal precondition of life" according to Nietzsche (424), that is, "[the] true knowledge, insight into the horrific truth" (*Tragedy* 46) which insofar as it "outweighs any motive leading to action" (46) has rendered the Maimed King paralyzed. A deeper analysis of this interpretation of the Waste Land myth is carried out in chapter 12 (p. 319) and chapter 15 (p. 376).

(101). The argument is presented through a commentary on the third act of Richard Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* (1865)—(perhaps not) incidentally, a nineteenth-century revision of Arthurian mythology—and formulated upon the hypothesis that the perception of that act "purely as a vast symphonic movement, with no assistance from words or images" (100), would shatter the individual consciousness, "having once put their ear to the heart of the universal Will, so to speak, and felt the raging desire for existence pour forth into all the arteries of the world as a thundering torrent or as the finest spray of a stream" (100-101). The solution to such a conflict, the reason why the individual can perceive the opera as a whole, "without the negation of individual existence" (100) is, precisely, the "assistance from words or images;" that is to say, the *interposition of myth*. As Nietzsche writes, "this is where the power of the *Apolline*, bent on restoring the almost shattered individual, bursts forth, bringing the healing balm of a blissful deception; suddenly we believe we are hearing only Tristan as he asks himself, motionless and numbed, 'the old melody; why does it awaken me?'" (101). Words—that is "myth, as symbol" (101)—intervene to restore the almost shattered individual consciousness, "and what had seemed to us earlier like some hollow sigh from the centre of being now tells us only how 'barren and empty is the sea'" (101).[47]

Words—and myths—offer then a meaning that is controlled, restricted, and *consciously* apprehensible, and thus the mythical dimension of Arthur embodies, in philosophical terms, as Mallen argues, "the struggle of the individual to sustain an illusion of self that can withstand the disturbing force of the Dionysian realm of consciousness" (29). Because as Tucker explains, Arthur's configuration as the mythical protagonist of an epic narrative does not "aggrandize a chronicle" but instead "shoulder[s] the burden of epic proof by appealing to facts of another, no less historical order: the cultural reception and transmission of a legend" (701). It does not matter that Arthur—as a mythical character, or as an incarnation of mythological thought—is not presented as a historically *true* figure, because regardless of whether the epic narrative of Arthur's ideal civilization pertains to the "epic of fact or the epic of legend—the power of a national story to hold its people together inheres in the power of a people to

[47] It hardly seems like a coincidence, for what is worth, that these words—which Nietzsche extricates to illustrate Apollonian (i.e. mythical) interposition in Wagner's opera as preventing the shattering of the individual consciousness that would have resulted from the perception of the operatic composition through a purely Dionysiac experience—appear as a direct quotation in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, in a moment when they may as well operate as an Apollonian interposition that interrupts the poetic voice's Dionysiac—or at least, *extra-conscious*—experience: "Your arms full, and your hair wet, *I could not / Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither / Living nor dead, and I knew nothing*, / Looking into the heart of light, the silence. / *Öd' und leer das Meer*" (38-42, my italics in lines 38-40).

hold their story true" (701). And thus Arthur does not operate as an allegedly true—and mystical—king, the way the historical kings in early modern drama operated as fictive representations of true royal figures whose mythical dramatization subverted the dominant ideology of kingship; on the contrary, "Arthur's legitimacy is vested, then, not in the traditional authority of kingship, but in what we might call 'Arthurity,' the strength of a gathering consensus that holds the king true" (Tucker 705). Hence Arthur functions as the mythical embodiment of a necessary fiction that is known to be fictive but it is also deemed indispensable so as to maintain social order, for social order depends on the illusion of royal power, which is possible only through a comprehension of life that is only made apprehensible through myth.

Brashear's interpretation of Camelot and King's Arthur's mythological power as an Apollonian illusion—necessary to protect the individual self from a chaotic (and thus destructive) experience of reality—is relevant because it rests upon the hypothesis that such an Apollonian illusion operates in the *Idylls* as the artistic correlative of the political illusion that sustained monarchical power in Victorian England, which, as Bagehot notes, is also a consequence of the limitations of our imagination. Monarchy, Bagehot explained—demonstrating the functionality of kingship myths to legitimize monarchy as the ruling political institution of the *Ancien Régime*—is the strongest form of government because it is an *intelligible* government that, as myth, can be easily explained and easily understood:

> The mass of mankind understand it, and they hardly anywhere in the world understand any other. It is often said that men are ruled by their imaginations; but it would be truer to say they are governed by the weakness of their imaginations. The nature of a constitution, the action of an assembly, the play of parties, the unseen formation of a guiding opinion, are complex facts, difficult to know, and easy to mistake. But the action of a single will, the fiat of a single mind, are easy ideas; anybody can make them out, and no one can ever forget them. When you put before the mass of mankind the question, 'Will you be governed by a king, or will you be governed by a constitution?' the inquiry comes out thus—'Will you be governed in a way you understand, or will you be governed in a way you do not understand?' (Bagehot 34)

The illusion of monarchy, or rather, the *myth* of kingly power as divinely sanctioned and guarantor of a preternatural cosmological balance, is an explanatory narrative that makes sense of the distribution of power between the government and the social structures that preserve the "unstable equilibrium" (Bagehot 33) of the civilized

modern state. But as represented in *Idylls of the King*, as Breashear notes, the Apollonian illusion that is Camelot and the kingly power of King Arthur—an illusion insofar as it is a myth, on the one hand; and as it embodies the fictionality of the monarch's power in Victorian England, on the other—can only sustain the illusion of civilization for a (fleeting) time. For King Arthur, as explained, is not represented as a mythical hero king, but as kingly figure who progressively degenerates so as to become counterpart of the Maimed King of the Waste Land. Arthur incarnates "the noble lie of the king's *corpus mysticum*" (Mallen 286), but the mystic body of the king is that of a Maimed King whose incapacity has laid his kingdom waste and thus doomed the ideal civilization embodied by Camelot.

ALL COURTESY IS DEAD

The *Idylls* unavoidably close with the King's death, but the passing of the Maimed King cannot be interpreted anymore as a displacement of the mythical healing it replaces, because King Arthur leaves no heir, and the successful Grail knight cannot take the place of the King he should have relieved. This is due to two reasons. First of all, Galahad "attains the Grail only in 'the spiritual city,' and only after burning 'every bridge' that might connect him to the social and historical world" (Tucker 712) and therefore "only the savior is saved" and the world is not redeemed "because the world is irredeemable" (Ryals 68). But perhaps more significantly, the Grail is never characterized as a mystical talisman that can in fact relieve the Maimed King, but contrarily, the Grail, or rather, the illusion of the Grail, actually undercuts the illusion of Arthur's kingly power as guarantor of civilization. Because the Holy Grail as it is represented in the *Idylls* embodies the opposite of what King Arthur and Camelot incarnate. The Grail only exists outside the limits of a conscious apprehension of reality. That is the reason why Percivale knows that were he to ever *see* the Grail, "it will crumble into dust" (Tennyson "Grail" 439), for as the hermit tells him: "Thou has not lost thyself to save thyself / As Galahad" (456-457). The Grail as represented in the *Idylls* crumbles upon scrutiny of the consciously perceptive individual, because "to the human mind as we know, all certain knowledge of things external is impossible"

(Brashear 45).[48] Thus the knowledge of the Grail is only possible through the loss of the self, as the hermit explains explicitly to Percivale; but such a loss of the self is in itself the consequence of the collapse of the Apollonian illusion that sustains the individual consciousness insofar as it provides a comprehensible apprehension of reality (Brashear 44); that is to say, the loss of oneself deemed necessary to know the Grail ineluctably requires the collapse of the myth of Arthur's divinely-sanctioned power, and thus such knowledge of the Grail cannot offer any hopes of social restoration.

Hence Percivale's narrative—that is, his attempt at interposing myth so as to apprehend the existence of the Grail within the boundaries of conscious perception—can only attest to the knights' failure to *know* the Grail, a phenomenon which, as previously explained, is equated with madness. Only temporarily during the Quest, the knights abandon the illusion that Arthur embodies: the illusion of monarchical mystical power and civilized order, and thus the illusion—the idealization of Camelot as the epitome of ordered civilization—succumbs to the anarchy it had only temporarily managed to set in order. For if in "The Coming of Arthur," the king had saved the wasted kingdom of Cameliard from the beasts that plagued the land[49] when he "slew the beast, and fell'd / The forest, letting in the sun, and made / Broad pathways for the hunger and the knight" (58-62), such civilizing endeavour reverts perversely and irreparably when Arthur's knights replace the beasts, in fact acting like savages. When the Red Knight, King's Arthur's nemesis, falls in battle, those "who watch'd him, *roar'd* / And shouted and *leapt* down upon the fall'n; / There *trampled* out his face from being known, / And sank his head in mire, and *slimed* themselves" ("Tournament" 467-470, my italics). As MacHann notes, while Arthur's men behave as beasts in battle, "the parallel ritualistic combat of the 'last tournament'" (215) is presided by a demoralized Lancelot who observes how the rules of the tournament have broken, and how the cynical Tristam wins, which prompts the damsels in the gallery to mutter: "All courtesy is dead" and "The glory of our Round Table is no more" (211-212). In MacHann's

[48] The notion that to know the Grail implies acquiring an esoteric knowledge of life that transcends the limits of consciousness—and actually takes place *outside* of consciousness—is cognate with Joseph Campbell's aforementioned elucidation of the Grail myth (see note 46 to this chapter, p. 154), and as such it will be revisited and explored more in depth in later chapters.

[49] "The Coming of Arthur" reads: "And thus the land of Cameliard was waste, / Thick with wet woods, and many a beast therein, / And none or few to scare or chase the beast; /So that wild dog, and wolf and boar and bear / Came night and day, and rooted in the fields, / And wallow'd in the gardens of the King. / And ever and anon the wolf would steal / The children and devour, but now and then, / Her own brood lost or dead, lent her fierce teat / To human sucklings; and the children, housed / In her foul den, there at their meat would growl, / And mock their foster-mother on four feet, / Till, straighten'd, they grew up to wolf-like men, / Worse than the wolves" ("Coming" 20-33).

terms, by the end of the *Idylls*, "moral anarchy has returned, [and] the order of the Round Table is effectively dead" (215.)

Mallen argues that Tennyson exposes the illusion of monarchy in Victorian England, but also that he endorses such an illusion by contributing to shaping "the consolatory fiction of the figurehead-monarch that England increasingly needs as the masses gain more and more power" (275). It is undoubtedly true that, as represented in *Idylls of the King*, such consolatory fiction is presented as the only alternative to social (and philosophical) chaos. But the answer to Mallen's rhetorical question—"Can the poet succeed where Arthur fails, by having his 'word' exert an abiding influence on the culture in which he lives, and especially on those beliefs that go without saying?" (286)—is arguably that no, he cannot. Because, from a myth-critical perspective, the transformation of Camelot into the Waste Land, inextricable from King Arthur's *degenerative* characterization as a Maimed-King figure, can hardly be argued to mythically represent an attempt at restoration and enforcement of the illusion of monarchy or of its associated beliefs. It can however be argued that perhaps T.S. Eliot's was right in his controversial assessment of Tennyson's poetry when he claimed that Tennyson was, in fact, "the saddest of all English poets," and "the most instinctive rebel against the society in which he was the most perfect conformist" (qt. in MacHann 220). For the mythical representation of Camelot as the Waste Land and King Arthur as counterpart of the Maimed King exposes the ineluctable degeneration and futility of the mythical illusion of monarchy, which is consequently represented as transient and as ineluctably condemned to collapse and subsequently unleash the overwhelming and annihilating chaos of a reality no longer ordered, classified, apprehended and maneuvered through the symbolic prism of mythopoeia.

The representation of such chaos is thus that of a Waste Land that can no longer be restored, for the social function of mythology is already known to be feeble and transitory. Myth is no longer simply devoid of mysticism and transcendence; in the transition towards "cultural modernity," myth is losing even its more pragmatic functionality as a symbolic ordering device. The implication is clearly apocalyptic, and thus allows for the hypothesis that towards the end of the nineteenth-century, "the *fin de siècle* served as a type of the *fin du monde*" (Rosenberg 36). Arguably, such an association is already prefigured in *Idylls of the King*, which, as argued throughout this chapter from a myth-critical perspective, indeed possesses "a nightmarish prophetic

quality that can be compared to that of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" (MacHann 220).

CHAPTER 6

IMPERIAL ROMANCE: JOSEPH CONRAD'S *HEART OF DARKNESS* AS A ROMANCE OF DEGENERATION

THE SYMBOLIST QUEST

Arguably, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1898) constitutes the epitome of the nineteenth-century romance subgenre known as 'imperial romance', which according to Susan Jones "encapsulates a complex group of fictions appearing in Britain between the 1880s and the 1920s which were devoted to narrating adventure in colonial settings" (406). Jones elaborates on the ambivalent meaning of the phrase 'imperial romance' however, arguing that the word 'imperialism' in fact did not begin to be used until the last few decades of the century, when Britain was in fact facing the decline of its world power. Thus, as Jones explains, "nostalgia for the 'romantic quest' at the end of the century arose partly out of an anxiety about Britain's waning economic position" (406). These imperial romances, as Jones notes, drew from the tradition of boys' adventures, which emphasized plot and action and exploited the landscapes of empire; however, giving account of the ideological changes brought about in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, there was "a shift in presentation in the later writers' work [that] often produced a less unified and far more equivocal understanding of imperial ideology than that of their predecessors" (Jones 407). Significantly, as this chapter will argue, such a shift in presentation is carried out in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* through the

reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth, traceable in the novella in two simultaneous mythical representations: the subversion of the quest myth embodied in Marlow's journey in search of Kurtz, and the myth-ritualistic recreation of the sacrificial killing of the divine king described by James Frazer in mythical and anthropological terms in *The Golden Bough* (1890), and represented in Conrad's novella through the life and death of Kurtz.

Heart of Darkness is, quite evidently, the story of a quest, but it is a quest in which "all the traditional signs, all the symbolic landmarks (…) have been tampered with. Instead of helping [Marlow] on his way, they mislead him. The blunt spears, the useless books, and the savage round tables have all lost their original meaning; not once of them is what it seems to be, and the conventions of the chivalric code are not respected" (Darras 39). And yet, in spite of the significant presence of subversive elements in the representation of the quest myth in Conrad's novella, as Darras himself argues, *Heart of Darkness* is "closer to medieval romance than to the detailed geographical adventure of Victorian times" (41) because, in Conrad's text, as in medieval romance, "the quest is a ritual" (39). The matter is not an issue of topography, as Conrad is in fact projecting the map of Africa onto a symbolic landscape (Darras 41), and thus the river remains nameless and the adventure takes place in a symbolic realm that, as Darras notes, is "composed of equal measures of Christianity and ancient mythology" (42). He elaborates:

> The Congo, the serpent of Genesis which fascinated the young Marlow in the shop window in London, is transformed, on the spot, into the river of Hades, Acheron, river of the dead, with its tributary Cocytus, the river of wailing. And it is the Victorian adventure, itself the inheritor of the adventures of the Renaissance, which brings us back to the frontiers of the Middle Ages, to the shadow Dante's forest (*silva oscura*) where Marlow goes forth (*nel mezzo del cammin*). (Darras 42)

It is this multiplicity of mythical references—which in fact will characterize the representation of the Waste Land myth from this point onwards—that determined Ian Watt's well-known argument regarding the symbolist nature of Conrad's novella (*Conrad* 180-200). In this view, Conrad's novella reflects two parallel developments in the symbolist tradition: the increasingly frequent use of symbolism in nineteenth century narrative—in which the meaning of a symbol is "still inherent in the literal object" (Watt *Conrad* 188) and leads back to the subject matter of the story, such as it

would be the case of the London fog in Charles Dickens's 1852 novel, *Bleak House*[50] (187-188)—and a minor symbolist tradition that arose in the romantic period; that is, the tradition of the symbolic novel *per se*, which is the fundamental influence that determines the process of mythical representation in Conrad's text. This latter development of symbolism is defined by Watt as follows:

> There is one tradition of fiction where the central symbol is more autonomous, and stands for a larger idea—the narrative of the symbolic quest. It is common enough in the romance, from the classical period, with *Argonautica* of Appollonius Rhodius, to the medieval, with the Arthurian stories of the Holy Grail. In all of these, however, the meaning of the symbolic object sought is quite clearly defined, and its great value is agreed on by the society at large. It was only in the romantic period that the quest plot turned on a central symbol which problematic and multiple in its meaning. (188)

As Watt notes, the most famous instances of this tradition written in English are Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851), and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, two apparent quest adventures in which "the symbolic objects which the protagonists seek—the whale and Kurtz—are both dangerous and ambiguous" (*Conrad* 188). Significantly, and as Watt himself suggests in his definition of the 'symbolic novel', the relevance of the central symbol in this narratives does not reside in how it embodies the central issues of story—as the London fog in *Bleak House*, operating "as a mental as well as a physical metaphor" (188)—but in the fact that such a symbol functions as correlative of the symbolic quest itself, and thus of what such a quest signifies in the literary tradition: the transcendental movement of romance "from a state of order through darkness, winter, and death, to rebirth, new order, and maturity" (Saunders 3). Such is, in truth, what the central symbol of Conrad's quest adventure—Kurtz, as the pursued object of Marlow's journey—stands for, as Kurtz is indeed the embodiment of the Enlightenment. And it is precisely that identification that makes possible the existence of the "imperial romance" as a genre: a romance in the traditional sense, but displaced

[50] Watt explains: "the fog in *Bleak House* obviously refers to much more than the London climate; it also stands for the blind and shapeless muddle of the law, and that of the society to which it belongs" (187). Significantly, *Bleak House* is considered by some critics as belonging to the tradition of romance. For instance, following Masson, Sander argues that Dickens might have resorted to the "'Ideal or Romantic' as a means of coming to terms in fiction with the 'ordinary train of events' in 'the modern state of society'" (*Conrad* 384). Dickens declared at the end of the novel's preface that he had "purposely dwelt upon the romantic side of familiar things" (XXXIV). Critics such as Storey have interpreted this provocative statement so as to mean that the judicial dispute that articulates Dickens's plot should be taken as both, true and symbolic, in the same way as Krook's obscure 'Spontaneous Combustion' (92). As in Watt's argument, romantic and symbolic are considered in this view as closely-related categories.

onto the imperialist endeavour that Kurtz incarnates, narrating adventures of expansion across dangerous and exotic colonial settings.

THE MYTH OF ENLIGHTENMENT

Initially, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is evidently structured as a quest-adventure novel (Valls Oyarzun *Formación* 235-236). The seaman and wanderer Charles Marlow, employed by a Belgian trading company as an ivory transporter, is assigned upon his arrival on Africa to sail up the Congo River into the inner station. There, he is told, he will find Kurtz, also an ivory trader and "a first-class agent" (Conrad 27), whom Marlow must retrieve after he has seemingly fallen ill. The reference of the quest romance is made evident when Marlowe reflects: "the approach to this Kurtz grubbing for ivory in the wretched bush was beset by as many dangers as though he had been an enchanted princess sleeping in a fabulous castle" (61). Marlow's journey, as that of the Grail Knight in traditional romance, is meant to relieve a sort of Waste Land, governed by an infirm king. The manager of the trading company, a strange but "great" (31) King Arthur who sits alone in "an immense round table" (32) and whose source of power seems to come from the fact that he never gets ill, explains to Marlow the purpose of his mission:

> The up-river stations had to be relieved. There had been so many delays already that he did not know who was dead and who was alive, and how they got on—and so on, and so on. He (…) repeated several times that the situation was 'very grave, very grave.' There were rumours that a very important station was in jeopardy, and its chief, Mr. Kurtz, was ill. Hoped it was not true. Mr. Kurtz was… (32)

The premise of Marlow's journey in search for Kurtz is thus perfectly consistent with traditional quest myths, for in these the magical object pursued—the Grail or any of its many reinterpretations—is always a healing talisman, which holds the power to restore communal health and wellbeing. The quest hero's journey is then always a *healing* journey. Marlow must find Kurtz, who has fallen sick, so that the up-river stations can be *relieved*, and thus the colonizing enterprise can be back to being efficient and productive. However, in order to complete his mission, Marlow (like the Grail Knight) must restore Kurtz to health; Kurtz, after all, stands in for the ideal of

Enlightenment that ideologically sustains the colonization and civilization of Africa. As Marlow learns, "the original Kurtz had been educated partly in England, and—as he was good enough to say himself—his sympathies were in the right place. His mother was half-English, his father was half-French. All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz" (Conrad 71).

Precisely because he is the product of Europe, and thus arguably embodies the enlightened ideal that resulted from the progress of Europe,[51] Kurtz receives the task from the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs to write a report that will guide the colonization endeavour. Unfortunately, in the process of writing the seventeen pages of his report, Kurtz's nerves "went wrong" (71). The consequence is that the content of Kurtz's allegedly enlightened report is inextricable from his own succumbing to the wilderness, so to speak. As he writes, white men, from their stage of human development, "must necessarily appear to them [=savages] in the nature of supernatural beings—we approach them with the might of a deity (…) [and] by the simply exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded" (71-72). As Kurtz's words reveal, it is thus the enlightened ideal of progress unbound that results in the mystical deification of the white colonizer, which is exactly the process that Kurtz undergoes in Africa and that "caused him to preside at certain midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites, which—as far as I reluctantly gathered from what I heard at various times—were offered up to him" (71).

Arguably, Kurtz's myth-ritualistic characterization as a typically-Frazerian divine king in *Heart of Darkness*—and his sickness, from the perspective of the company—cannot be separated from his symbolization as embodying the ideal of the European Enlightenment that brought about the civilizing mission that ideologically sustained colonization; hence, the process of mythical reinterpretation carried out by Kurtz's sickness and death might be interpreted as a commentary on Enlightenment and its myths, that is to say, its traditional legitimizing narratives. Horkheimer and Adorno argued that, even though, "enlightenment's program was the disenchantment of the world [as] it wanted to dispel myths, to overthrow fantasy with knowledge" (1), "enlightenment also recognizes itself in the old myths. No matter which myths are against it, by being used as arguments they are made to acknowledge the very principle

[51] Michael Levenson explains: "the prelapsarian Kurtz had talked of pity, science, progress, love, justice, and the conduct of life (...) They constitute an ideology of enlightenment, a collective moral inheritance which, plainly enough, arouses virtous aspiration and then proves unequal to the passion it excites" (qt. Valls Oyarzun *Formación* 221).

of corrosive rationality of which enlightenment stands accused" (3-4). The demythologizing endeavour of Enlightenment incurs in an inescapable paradox: myths, in the argument of Horkheimer and Adorno, are in fact an age-old device that serve the same purpose of dominion than the enlightened agenda; "myth sought to report, to name, to tell of origins—but therefore also to narrate, record, explain" (5). And like mythology, Enlightenment is untrue:

> Its untruth does not lie in the analytical method, the reduction to elements, the decomposition through reflection, as its Romantic enemies had maintained from the first, but in its assumption that the trial is prejudged. When in mathematics the unknown becomes the unknown quantity in an equation, it is made into something long familiar before any value has been assigned. (Horkheimer and Adorno 18)

In myth, "the Olympian deities are no longer directly identical with elements, but signify them" (Horkheimer and Adorno 6). Myth symbolizes the world so that it can be categorized[52] and classified, and so does the Enlightenment. Such analytical, mathematical knowledge of the world, establishes that "the actual is validated, knowledge confines itself to repeating it, thought makes itself mere tautology" (Horkheimer and Adorno 20) and thus "enlightenment thereby regresses to the mythology it has never been able to escape. For mythology had reflected in its forms the essence of the existing order—cyclical motion, fate, domination of the world as truth—and had renounced hope" (20). Significantly, in order to illustrate the identification between enlightened and mythological thought, Horkheimer and Adorno turn to the classical Greek myth of Persephone, a seasonal myth that personifies the vegetation so as to explain what James G. Frazer, linking the myth to the Eleusinian fertility mysteries, describes as "some of the most familiar, yet eternally affecting aspects of nature, (…) the melancholy gloom and decay of autumn and (…) the freshness, the brightness, and the verdure of spring" (462).[53] This myth, Hockheimer and Adorno

[52] See p. 148.

[53] In spite of the obvious thematic similarities, the literary representation of the classical myth of Persephone cannot be considered a reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth per se, prior to Eliot's "anthropological temper" (Levenson 202) in representing the Arthurian myth in his 1922 poem, *The Waste Land*, which, as it will be explained in detail, was actually inspired by the myth-ritualistic studies of authors such as James G. Frazer and Jesse L. Weston. However, this study cannot avoid at least mentioning Thomas Hardy's novel *Tess of the D'Ubervilles* (1891), which in subversively reinterpreting the myth of Persephone, is in fact transforming a cyclical myth of regeneration into a myth of degeneration, in a way not altogether different from the dissident reinterpretations of the Waste Land myth analyzed in the second part of this thesis. As Bonaparte explains about Hardy's novel, "either the modern writer must seek a true rebirth by repossessing the literal magic of the myth, in which case he ends up writing an old-fashioned religious narrative, or he must find a suitable image for suggesting a

argue, is no different from an enlightened understanding of the world, because "the world as a gigantic analytical judgment, the only surviving dream of science, is of the same kind as the cosmic myth which linked the alternation of spring and autumn to the abduction of Persephone" (20). Drawing precisely from the myth-ritualistic explanation of the myth advanced by Frazer, they elaborate:

> Originally, the rape of the goddess was directly equated with the dying of nature. It was repeated each autumn, and even the repetition was not a succession of separate events, but the same one each time. With the consolidation of temporal consciousness the process was fixed as a unique event in the past, and ritual assuagement of the terror of death in each new cycle of seasons was sought in the recourse to the distant past. But such separation is powerless. The postulation of the single past event endows the cycle with a quality of inevitability, and the terror radiating from the ancient event spreads over the whole process as its mere repetition. The subsumption of the actual, whether under mythical prehistory or under mathematical formalism, the symbolic relating of the present to the mythical event in the rite or to the abstract category in science, makes the new appear as something predetermined which therefore is really the old. (Horkheimer and Adorno 20-21).

The transition from ritual to myth, that is, from (immutable) magic to (changeable) narrative, like analytical thought, determines a sense of inevitability in an understanding of the world and, in consequence, "justified in the guise of brutal facts as something eternally immune to intervention, the social injustice from which those facts arise is as sacrosanct today as the medicine man once was under the protection of his gods" (Hockheimer and Adorno 21). This premise can of course be extended to colonization and its legitimizing narratives, as colonization is above all the establishment of a legitimized relationship of dominion and, as hypothesized, in mythological thought just as in enlightened thought, "in their mastery of nature, the creative God and the ordering mind are alike. Man's likeness to God consists in sovereignty over existence, in the lordly gaze, in the command. Myth becomes

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resurrection in a secular, modern way, in which case he undermines the very point of his paradigm. This is the novel's final irony, that in the making of mythic arguments modern texts must simultaneously and inescapably mismake them" (430). In Hardy's narrative, the instincts expressed in the original myth are constrained by the mores of the day, and myth is reshaped so as to express the "calamitous symptoms of an unmythological age" (427). In the reinterpreted version of the classical myth, the principles of the time turn discontent into vice, hunger for life into transgression, and mythic longing into lust (Bonaparte 430); the life-forces that ensured regeneration are stifled and repressed. The union of Hades and Persephone guarantees fertility, but Tess bears a child called Sorrow, who unsurprisingly dies an infant. Tragedy erupts from moral blindness, and Liza-Lu's replacement of Tess at the end of the novel, if anything, certifies that Tess is dead, and she will never live again (431).

enlightenment and nature mere objectivity" (6). Horkheimer and Adorno's elaboration on this argument is oddly reminiscent of Kurtz's character:

> The distance of subject from object, the presupposition of abstraction, is founded on the distance from things which the ruler attains by means of the ruled. The songs of Homer and the hymns of the *Rig Veda*[54] date from the time of territorial dominion and its strongholds, when a warlike race of overlords imposed itself on the defeated indigenous population. The supreme god among gods came into being with this civil world in which the king, as leader of the arms-bearing nobility, tied the subjugated people to the land while doctors, soothsayers, artisans, and traders took care of circulation. (Horkheimer and Adorno 9)

The parallelism that Horkheimer and Adorno draw between the relationships of dominion that regulate the world in mythology—atop which stands God, and immediately beneath, God's anointed King[55]—and the dominion executed by the enlightened subject over the cognoscible object can arguably be equated to the double symbolization of Kurtz's character in *Heart of Darkness*, who, as it has been mentioned, stands in simultaneously for the enlightened ideal that underlies the colonizing process, and as the counterpart of the Frazerian divine king that stands as the central figure of the rites of sacrifice from which, according to myth-ritualism, all mythology derives. Nonetheless, the fact that Kurtz's *natural* death represents not the successful culmination of Marlow's quest journey, but its failure, reinterprets the mythical quest that should have stood as embodiment of progress, transforming it instead into a narrative of degeneration. Marlow's failed Grail Quest, then, gives account of the contemporary theory of degeneration, which is, in fact, the ultimate subversion of the ideology of progress and thus, of the legitimizing agenda of Enlightenment with regards to the colonization of Africa, in the case of Conrad's text.

THE DEGENERATE KING

As William P. Greenslade explains, the last decades of the nineteenth century are marked by a terrible paradox: "the lack of synchrony between the rhetoric of progress,

[54] Jesse Weston's considers the *Rig Veda*, an ancient Indian sacred collection of Vedic Sanskrit hymns, as one of the "earliest existing literary evidence" of the ritual origin of the Waste Land myth, as it contains "certain parallels with our Grail stories" (25).
[55] See p. 63.

the confident prediction by the apostles of *laissez-faire* of ever increasing prosperity and wealth, and the facts on the ground, the evidence in front of people's eyes, of poverty and degradation at the heart of ever richer empires" (15). In this context rises the belief in the existence of degeneration, a theory that offered release to the generalized feelings of bafflement and disillusionment that characterized the turn of the century (Greenslade 15) by hypothesizing that societies could regress as well as progress, and that the cause for such regression was to be found, as argued by the French psychiatrist Augustin Morel, in "a morbid deviation from a perfect primitive type" (16). Such deviation, a disease, presented three different symptoms: physical deformity, perversion of the organism, and emotional disturbance, and it was the root of collective degradation because it was hereditary (16). Furthermore, as it was later argued, it was also contagious. Dana Seitler explains:

> Physicians such as Krafft-Ebing, Nordau, and Lombroso asserted that homosexuality, hysteria, feeble-mindedness, atavism, and neurasthenia were all symptoms of the degeneration of the human race, through the determinism of heredity. But their work just as persistently warned its readers of the possibility of contagion from other already existing degenerates (…) modern decay infects the individual, who passes on the infection to offspring, who then reinfect the social body in ever greater proportions. In short, degeneracy is an infectious plague. (539)

As it was explained in Max Nordau's highly influential *Degeneration* (*Entartung*, 1892; translated into English in 1895), the art of the *fin-de-siècle* manifested the degenerative pathologies of its artists; that is, of writers such as Wagner, Nietzsche, Ibsen, Tolstoy, Zola and the French Symbolists (Greenslade 121). Yet within only two years after its publication, Nordau's book was heavily contested and criticized, and, as Greenslade explains, "in due course its fate was ironic dismissal" (120). But whether literature and art eventually dismissed Nordau's thesis, degeneration theory had a wide social impact. As Seitler explains, "the ultimate effect of degeneration theory was not the restoration of public health and social hygiene it envisioned but the dehumanization of entire populations, as well as the construction of brand new pathologies, whose meanings rested on the belief that deviance manifests itself in the visible body" (527).

In this sense, Kurtz might be regarded as epitomizing degeneration theory, as a clear victim of neurasthenia and atavism. His sickness, however, like the brand new pathologies constructed by degeneration theory is somewhat fabricated (insofar as it is

distorted) by the members of the trading company, who somehow impose upon him the causes of his malady in order to ostracize him, while the real nature and symptoms of Kurtz's sickness, along with the physiological causes behind it, remain unknown. In fact, his illness is enigmatically and vaguely identified with the *infection* of wilderness: "The wilderness had patted him on the head, and, behold, it was like a ball—an ivory ball; it had caressed him, and—lo!—he had withered; it had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation. He was its spoiled and pampered favourite" (Conrad 69). Bizarre as it may be, the notion of a wilderness infection literally embodies the failure of the enlightened mission that Kurtz represents: once the main representative of the political ideal falls victim to the wilderness he was meant to civilize, so does the collective that stands behind Kurtz, that is to say, the society of progress that had committed to the purpose of extending civilization over the colonized world. In mythical terms, of course, the failure of Kurtz being inextricable from the failure of the political ideal he stands for can only be represented as the illness and (non-regenerative) death of a divine king.

Kurtz's sickness is identified with the telluric drive that determines his communion with the earth. To Marlow's eyes, Kurtz is ill because he has sealed his soul to the soul of the wilderness. He has merged with the jungle. The wilderness has caressed, loved and embraced Kurtz until they have become one. His head is made of ivory, and he has *withered*; the identification between Kurtz and the vegetation is complete and explicit. And yet it is this communion with the life of the jungle—that in Frazerian terms enthrones Kurtz as a divine king, which coincides with his position as emissary of the colonizers' cause and as enlightened subject[56]—which, from the perspective of the company members, is considered to be Kurtz's illness. There is then a deliberate ideological misuse of the rhetoric of sickness, which codifies the dialectics between the Victorian ideal of progress and Kurtz's atavistic drive. The acceptance of the company's methods and the agreement with its ideals is identified with health, while the rejection of the colonizers' purposes and justifications are regarded as insanity. Kurtz's illness, as far as the company is concerned, is in fact the process by means of which "he has stripped himself of all the cultural values he took so ostentatiously into

[56] "Enlightenment stands in the same relationship to things as the dictator to human beings. He knows them to the extent that he can manipulate them. The man of science knows things to the extent that he can make them. Their 'in-itself' becomes 'for him.' In their transformation the essence of things is revealed as always the same, a substrate of domination" (Horkheimer and Adorno 6).

Africa" (Berthoud 53)—which is not to say that Kurtz is not sick. Kurtz is *dying*: "Kurtz's life was running swiftly, too, ebbing, ebbing out of his heart into the sea of inexorable time" (Conrad 97). Yet the real causes of his sickness are ignored and distorted. The company seems to have no interest in curing Kurtz, as they refuse to send medicines upriver and the manager deliberately delays the salvaging of Marlow's boat as part of his intrigue against Kurtz.[57] Illness, in the line of the theory of degeneration, is mostly identified with a form of social dissent.

Marlow's heroic quest journey to *relieve* Kurtz—parallel, upon a mythical reading, to Perceval's visit to the haunted castle of the Fisher King—is then corrupted from the beginning. The symbolic quest, supposedly adventurous and hopefully profitable, is revealed as a senseless exercise in futility. Marlow realizes: "It occurred to me that my speech or my silence, indeed any action of mine, would be a mere futility" (55). As Norman Sherry notes, there is an "ironic treatment of the concept of 'progress' as it is applied to the setting up of trading posts in the jungle" (125). The further up Marlow travels, the more decay and desolation he encounters. Progression (Marlow's literal journey up-river) turns into regression (Kurtz's atavist lapse); the Grail Knight does not find the Fisher King at the beginning of his journey, so that he can later on pursue his mission to find the Grail. In *Heart of Darkness*, in a manner not altogether different from the case of mythical inversion explored in the previous chapter, what should have been the beginning of the journey becomes the end, and thus Marlow's quest leads only towards increasing decay and hopelessness:

> The current was more rapid now, the steamer seemed at her last gasp, the stern-wheel flopped languidly, and I caught myself listening on tiptoe for the next beat of the boat, for in sober truth I expected the wretched thing to give up every moment. *It was like watching the last flickers of a life*. But still we crawled. Sometimes I would pick out a tree a little way ahead to *measure our progress* towards Kurtz, but I lost it invariably before we got abreast. (Conrad 55, my italics)

[57] Critics such as Norman Sherry have gone as far as claiming that "the death of Kurtz is laid at the manager's door" (47), as Kurtz never receives the help he needs to get cured.

THE BLIGHTED WILD LAND

Marlow tries without success to measure his progress towards Kurtz; as he reaches his destination, all he can see are "the last flickers of a life": the last flickers of Kurtz's life, but also the last flickers of the land that is dying as the King's vigour deteriorates. At first, Africa seems to Marlow to be exuberantly alive: "the edge of a colossal jungle, so dark-green as to be almost black, fringed with white surf, ran straight, like a ruled line, far, far away along a blue sea whose glitter was blurred by a creeping mist. The sun was fierce, the land seemed to glisten and drip with steam" (Conrad 19). But a mist is creeping over the wilderness as Marlow advances inland towards "where the merry dance of death and trade goes on" (20). The dance of *trade*—that is, the business of the company—is a dance of death that is literally killing the land and its people.[58] Eloquently, when Marlow first encounters the natives in the coast, he describes them shouting and singing, possessing a "wild vitality" and an "intense energy of movement that was as natural and true as the surf along their coast" (20). However, after they are "brought from all the recesses of the coast in all the legality of time contracts, lost in uncongenial surroundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient and were then allowed to crawl and rest" (24). The spectacle is rather macabre, a true dance of death:

> Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees leaning against the trunks, clinging to the earth, half coming out, half effaced within the dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment and despair (...) They were dying slowly—it was very clear (...) They were nothing earthly now,—nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confused in the greenish gloom (...) All about others were scattered in every pose of contorted collapse, as in some picture of a massacre of a pestilence. (24-25)

Insofar as the natives grow sick and inefficient once they are brought inland from the coast "in all the legality of time contracts" (Conrad 24), it can be argued that it is the colonising endeavour that generates the natives' sickness, thus becoming the cause to their own inefficiency. This is relevant because, for a company man like Marlow, redemption was to be found in efficiency, an ideal conceived by Marlow as a strangely

[58] The land where the company has settled has a "still and earthy atmosphere as an overheated catacomb" (20); the rivers have become "*streams of death in life*, whose banks were rotting into mud, whose waters, thickened into slime, invaded the contorted mangroves, that seemed to writhe at us in the extremity of an impotent despair" (20, my italics).

pagan-reminiscent deity: "something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to" (10).[59] The reverent submission before efficiency is expressively contrasted with the action of *crawling* pitifully. When the enslaved natives sicken and become "inefficient", they are "allowed to crawl away" and rest (24). But Marlow's boat, also, his vehicle of progress, is described as "that cripple of a steamboat" (63), which, "seemed at her last gasp" (55); "but still we *crawled*" (55), narrates Marlow, illustrating how his movement is as sickly as the natives'. He cannot relieve Kurtz and restore the colonized land, because he is actually spreading the generalized sickness brought about by colonization. He crawls as Kurtz, who cannot walk at all and is carried in a stretcher and crawls when he tries to escape and return to the wilderness.

Crawling as a movement denotes regression, a sort of a return to infancy that seems to reinforce the dialectics between the ideal of progress that propels colonization and the ineluctable fate of everyone involved in the mission, who sooner or later end up crawling. According to Ian Watt, Kurtz is the "supreme exhibit" (*Conrad* 233) of this dialectic: "atavistic regression could hardly go further; a man crawling like an animal to be worshipped by followers in the ceremonial guise of animals" (231-32). It follows from Watt's commentary that the action of crawling—even if interpreted as a symptom of disease—cannot be separated from Kurtz's telluric drive, his need to return to the earth and be embraced by the wilderness. But the wilderness has, unsurprisingly, become a blighted land, a sick land, that is, a mythical Waste Land. The wild vitality of the African coasts that Marlow witnessed upon his arrival has given way to an all-encompassing deadly stasis in which "the living trees, lashed together by the creepers and every living bush of the undergrowth, might have been changed into stone, even to the slenderest twig, to the lightest leaf. It was not sleep—it seemed unnatural, like a state of trance" (56). When Marlow arrives at Kurtz's village, he notices: "I don't know why, but never before, did this land, this river, this jungle, the every arch of this blazing sky, appear to me so hopeless and so dark" (79). The jungle is literally crying out in despair: "from the depths of the woods went out such a tremulous and prolonged wail of mournful fear and utter despair as may be imagined to follow the flight of the last hope

[59] These words are extremely eloquent for how they foreshadow the sort of deity Kurtz has become but also because, precisely due to the pagan echoes that transpire from Marlow's unusual characterization of 'efficiency', it is possible to relate this concept to the multiplicity of mythological references of the text, both pagan and Christian, thus undercutting the redemptive (and legitimizing) nature of 'efficiency' as a social ideal. Once characterized as a mythological reference among many—that is, as reminiscent of a pagan deity—efficiency is subjected to the same process of mythical reinterpretation and re-signification as any other mythological element in the text.

from the earth" (66). Kurtz and the wilderness have merged into a transcendental embrace: the wilderness "had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own" (69), and so his sickness has been transferred to the land. Watt explains:

> There is nothing inherently improbable in Kurtz having been accorded sacred, if not actually divine, status. It was commonly accorded African kings and chieftains at the time; and J. G. Frazer had in *The Golden Bough*, whose first edition came out in 1890, that in such cases the illness or impending departure of such a leader as Kurtz would be regarded as calamitous for his people. (*Conrad* 232)

As "the harlequin" explains to Marlow when he at last reaches Kurtz's station, "They adored him (…) What can you expect? (…) he came to them with thunder and lightning, you know—and they had never seen anything like it—and very terrible" (80). As Watt notes, and as Kurtz himself hypothesizes in the already-commented report commissioned by the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs that he writes, "the rightness of a god was a role almost automatically conferred on the white European when he left home and went out to govern the colonies" (Watt *Conrad* 164). However, far from committing to the civilizing agenda of colonization, Kurtz "discovers his existential freedom under circumstances which enable him to pervert the ultimate direction of nineteenth-century thought: not the disappearance but the replacement of God" (166). But in such a replacement of God, Kurtz's mystical enthroning is not represented as a leap forwards, but as a movement of atavistic regression (Watt *Conrad* 166). In mythical terms, Kurtz might be a godly king, but he is a *sick* divine king that will die without a successor. Frazer explains:

> In the West African kingdom of Congo, there was a supreme pontiff called Chitomé or Chitombé, whom the negroes regarded as a god on earth and all-powerful in heaven (…) And if he were to die a natural death, they thought that the world would perish, and the earth, which he alone sustained by this power and merit, would immediately be annihilated. (197)
> (…)
> Accordingly when he fell ill and seemed likely to die, the man who was destined to be his successor entered the pontiff's house with a rope or a club and strangled or clubbed him to death. (310)[60]

[60] This is exactly what happens, by the way, in one of the most interesting reinterpretations of Conrad's novella in the twentieth century, Francis Ford Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now* (1979). Captain Willard (Marlow's counterpart in Coppola's film) beats Kurtz to death in the temple and then emerges as rightful

As recurrently mentioned before, in *The Golden Bough* James Frazer theorizes that all myths come originally from a primitive tribal ritual during which the divine king, when he fell ill or as he grew old, was killed in order to ensure the restoration of fertility during springtime, as his divine spirit was, by means of this sacrificial ceremony, transmitted to a vigorous successor. The aim of the ritual was to prevent the natural death of the king, which would be calamitous for the land and the tribe, as the body of the king was believed to contain the spirit of vegetation. This is what Robert Segal defines as "second myth-ritualism," an anthropological hypothesis according to which the tribal king "does not merely act the part of the god, but is himself divine, by which Frazer means that the god resides in him. Just as the health of vegetation depends on the health of its god, so now the health of the god depends on the health of the king: as the king goes, so goes the god of vegetation, and so in turn goes vegetation itself. (Segal *Myth* 65). The wasting of the land thus comprises the consequence that derives from the divine king's deteriorating health, and as such it is represented in *Heart of Darkness*. The mode of romance is no longer just a conglomerate of narratives that is argued to express a journey of physical and spiritual restoration. In Conrad's novella, the romance quest is presented as the narrative counterpart of the sacrificial ritual that, two decades later, will be hypothesized as the actual primitive version of the Arthurian myth of the Waste Land. Such clear-cut identification between the Waste Land myth and the killing of the divine king, applied to *Heart of Darkness*, is doubtlessly speculative and anachronistic, but the connection between the traditional quest archetype, reinterpreted in the novel, and Frazerian mythology is highly pertinent for this study, insofar as it establishes a continuum of meaning in the evolution of romance that will lead directly to the explicit, myth-ritualistic representation of the Waste Land myth in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922).

After the publication of Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* in 1920, it has been commonly accepted that the Fisher King of Arthurian mythology represents in

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successor among his worshipping subjects. Nevertheless, the regenerative power that such a ceremony is supposed to bring about becomes frustrated when Willard abandons the village. The blending of scenes at the beginning of the film, merging Willard's delirious waiting in Saigon and the ritual killing of Kurtz, suggests the possibility of an eternal recurrence which does not offer the possibility of regeneration, as it is not only frustrated by Willard's refusal to 'succeed' Kurtz, but also by the implication that his flight singals the imminent bombing of the base. This kind of degenerative recurrence is also present in *Heart of Darkness*, as it will be explained further on (see p. 210), since it constitutes a crucial element in the process of mythical reinterpretation in Conrad's text that will influence T.S. Eliot's representation of the Waste Land myth in *The Waste Land* (1922).

some way the narrative evolution of Frazer's divine king of ancestral religion. In *Heart of Darkness*, however—and perhaps here resides the actual reinterpretation of the quest myth in the novella—Frazer's divine king is sick like the Arthurian Maimed King (and, in the same way as in medieval romance, the aim of the quest is to relieve him), but he is also the object pursued. Perceval's mythic journey starts at the Fisher King's castle. Marlow's journey ends (in a way, because Marlow's journey is unavoidably cyclical) in Kurtz's station. Kurtz is the object pursued, but he is also the sick king that must be restored to health so that the community is redeemed.[61] The object pursued in the quest is, as Watt argues, "dangerous and ambiguous" (188); however, the myth-critical reading of the novella permits a clearer interpretation of Kurtz's ambiguity as counterpart of the medieval Holy Grail. Because in strict mythical terms, Kurtz cannot be identified with the Grail: he offers no nourishment or restoration; he is no mystical source of life. In strict mythical terms, Kurtz is the Fisher King. Even more acutely, he is the Knight that, completing the journey, has ascended to the throne. But as a colonizer—Kurtz is a knight in the same way that Marlow is a knight; they are both company traders exploring new territories and spreading the advantages of civilization—he has not rightfully inherited the kingdom he governs. He has usurped it, and once again in strictly mythical terms, an usurper is an unfit king; that is to say, a king that, according of the principles of Frazerian myth-ritualism, must be killed to prevent the wasting the land.

In *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz is explicitly represented as divine, but his divinity is codified as a form of degradation. Marlow realizes this: "I had to deal with a being to whom I could not appeal in the name of anything high or low. I had, even like the niggers, to invoke him—himself—his own exalted and incredible degradation" (Conrad 95). As mentioned, Kurtz's status as divine king constitutes the ultimate and most perverse realization of the colonizers' ideal; yet the consequences of the materialization of such an ideal are fatal. Kurtz is king, but he is a degenerate king. He is, after all, a usurper; but also the emissary of a dying Europe. He is to all extents a sick divine king, but the man destined to become his successor does not kill him; he dies naturally—the

[61] In *Heart of Darkness*, Grail and Fisher King are identified in a way that preludes the processes of mythical ambivalence that will characterize the representation of the Waste Land myth in a significant amount of twentieth-century works, but it also demonstrates the interconnection between the mythical Maimed King and the Grail that is the source of his life. For even though the narrative evolution of the myth of the Grail during the Middle Ages codifies the quest as an actual journey across several Arthurian spaces, from the earliest extant version of the myth, King and Grail have been inextricably connected, as the King depends on the nourishment provided by the Grail to stay alive.

terrible fate that the sacrificial killing of the king is meant to prevent. The structure and finality of the Frazerian rite are deliberately flouted. If the rite had been completed by a legitimate successor, the land might have been restored from being a "grove of death" (28), an "empty land" (28), and a "deadly place" (61). Marlow has the chance (and the thought) to kill Kurtz, but Marlow is sick himself; he too comes from a dying Europe, and represents the same colonizer ideal embodied by Kurtz. Had he killed Kurtz, the rite might be argued to have been in vain,[62] yet the description of the moment when Marlow considers the possibility of killing Kurtz is rather eloquent. He threatens him: "'if you try to shout I'll smash your head with'—There was not a stick or a stone near. 'I will throttle you for good,' I corrected myself" (94). Contrast with Frazer: "when [the king] fell ill and seemed likely to die, the man who was destined to be his successor entered the pontiff's house with a rope or a club and strangled or clubbed him to death" (Frazer 310).

There is, in fact, an early episode in the novella that foreshadows the calamitous consequences of Kurtz's death, when Marlow is told about his predecessor, Fresleven, who killed a local chief, hammering him with a stick. According to Marlow, Fresleven "had been a couple of years already out there engaged in the noble cause (…) and he probably felt the need at last of asserting his self-respect in some way. Therefore he whacked the old nigger mercilessly" (13). Such a blatant violation of the ritual patterns established by Frazer, with a usurper/colonizer taking the place of the tribal chief without cause, results in utter desolation: "the village was deserted, the huts gaped black, rotting, all askew within the fallen enclosures. A calamity had come to it, sure enough. The people had vanished. Mad terror had scattered them, men, women, and children, through the bush, and they had never returned" (13). The enlightened ideal of civilization, embodied by the company traders, that is, by Kurtz, Marlow and Fresleven, is thus explicitly presented as destructive. In Marlow's words, civilization is "like a running blaze on a plain, like a flash of lightning in the clouds" (Conrad, 8). Civilization is not the ultimate realization of progress, but a mere accident, a brief intermission in a continuum of all-encompassing darkness. "We live in the flickler," Marlow says, "—may it last as long as the old earth keeps rolling!" (8).

[62] As Marlow himself comments, "I did not want to have the throttling of him, you understand—and indeed it would have been very little use for any practical purpose" (Conrad 94).

THE EXTINCTION OF ALL LIFE

In 1898—the same year in which *Heart of Darkness* was published—Joseph Conrad wrote a letter to Cunninghame Graham, stating that "the fate of a humanity condemned ultimately to perish from cold is not worth troubling about. If you take it to heart it becomes an unendurable tragedy. If you believe in improvement you must weep, for the attained perfection must end in cold, darkness and silence" (qt. Hawkins 77).[63] Significantly, Conrad's novella begins with a sunset: "And at last, in its curved and imperceptible fall, the sun sank low, and from glowing white changed to a dull red without rays and without heat, *as if about to go out suddenly, stricken to death by the touch of the gloom brooding over a crowd of men*" (Conrad 6, my italics).

Traditionally, the image of the sunset is a clear symbol of decline: light turns into darkness and heat becomes cold. However, the semantic choices of the previous description transform a setting sun into a *dying* sun, which cosmologically signifies the end of a cyclical understanding of time. Such cyclical consideration of time is of course the cosmological foundation of seasonal rites—such as the killing of the divine king, dramatized in the figure of Kurtz—and, arguably, of the myths (such as the myth of the Waste Land) that developed from those rites. The death of cyclical time, of the time of perpetual regeneration and renewal, is not incidental in the context of Conrad's text. As Ian Watt explains, "it is really the London smoke which makes the sun seem to change colour, but watching the process evokes a moment of primitive fear that the sun may desert the human world, and abandon it to 'cold, darkness and silence'" (*Conrad* 155). It is highly eloquent that, even though symbolically, the Western metropolis—its smoke, synecdoche of its industrial progress—is responsible for the dying of the sun. Note the contrast between the sun above Europe and the sun above Africa; while the European sun is "dull red without rays and without heat" (Conrad 6), above Africa, "the sun was fierce, the land seemed to glisten and drip with steam" (19). As MacDuffie argues, "the difference in these representations of the sun's energy (...) corresponds roughly to a distinction Conrad draws between the tropics and the imperial center, between nature's power as it is experienced and nature as it is harnessed, channelled and utilized by industrial civilization" (75). Benjamin Kidd, who published the influential

[63] As it has been argued, the references in *Heart of Darkness* to a dying sun are in fact directly influenced by the second law of thermodynamics, which was disseminated in the popular Victorian press and popularized the ominous prediction of the eventual heat death of the sun (MacDuffiee 75).

The Control of the Tropics also in 1898, argued that there was a moral necessity behind the colonization process: to prevent the natural resources from "the richest regions of the earth" from going to waste (86). However, as Allen MacDuffie explains, Kidd's enthusiastic rhetoric was in fact a means to justify the fact that "immense resources, including energy resources, were flowing from the imperial holdings to the European centers, and industrial civilization was becoming increasingly dependent upon them" (75-76). This notion originates a very significant paradox, since the redemptive rhetoric of efficiency, mythologized in *Heart of Darkness* in the form of a half-pagan, half-Christian deity, is revealed as a disguise which serves to hide an actual relationship of dependency. This dependency of the supposedly "energetic races of the world" (Kidd 86) stems from the exhaustion of soil vitality in Europe, which, as MacDuffie explains, "meant that for capitalist agriculture to continue to grow, an influx of natural resources and fertilizing agents from other regions became necessary. The chemist Justus von Liebig critiqued imperialism explicitly in this terms: 'Great Britain robs all countries of the conditions of their fertility'" (79). If the problem in Europe may be understood as an issue of soil exhaustion, which is spread to the colonies after colonizers exploit and extinguish the latter's natural resources, a myth-critical reading that explores the novella as embedded in the paradigm of the Waste Land myth is undoubtedly appropriate. Kurtz is the epitome of the colonizers' ideal and purposes, yet his symbolization as a Frazerian divine king makes him directly responsible for the wasting of the land. Consequently, by extension, colonization can arguably be made responsible for the exhaustion and nefarious exploitation of the colonies. Europe—and the modern western world, by extension—has become a metaphorical Waste Land in the process of becoming a literal one.

Marlow's cyclical, aimless quest ends and begins thus in the colonial metropolis, a city that reminds him of "a whited sepulchre" (14). The analogy is taken from the account in Matthew's gospel of Christ's accusations against the Pharisees: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness" (*KJB*, Matt. 23.27). Similarly, the colonial metropolis is "a city of the dead" (Conrad 16) that hauntingly preludes T.S. Eliot's "unreal city" (*TWL* 60) in *The Waste Land*,[64] where the survivors of the Great War crowd the streets of London,

[64] As Editor Michael North explains, T.S. Eliot's "unreal city" is an "adaptation of Charles Baudelaire's 'Fourmillante cité' from his poem 'Le sept viellards' (in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, 1857)" (in Eliot *TWL* 7, note

ghosting over the London Bridge like the languishing souls in Dante's Limbo.[65] The colonial city in *Heart of Darkness* is also crowded with living-dead people,[66] "hurrying through the streets to filch a little money from each other, to devour their infamous cookery, to gulp their unwholesome beer, to dream their insignificant and silly dreams" (Conrad 102). They live entombed in an immense sepulchre made of "the ivory drained from the Congo [that has been] instantiated in the very physical structure of Brussels itself" (MacDuffie 84). The company's trading business, the exploitation of ivory, results in nothing but the construction of an immense tomb, and consequently "the tendency of imperial capitalism is toward monumental forms of waste and inefficiency" (90-1).

Such is the fate of the "precious trickle of ivory" that comes from "the depths of darkness" (Conrad 26). Such is also the fate of Marlow's quest: to return to the sepulchre where he started from, specifically to the "sombre and polished sarcophagus" (106) where Kurtz's Intended 'lives' as a ghost: "She came forward, all in black with a pale head, floating towards me in the dusk (...) This fair hair, this pale visage, this pure brow, seemed surrounded by an ashy halo from which the dark eyes looked out at me" (106). She desires to know Kurtz's last words, what Marlow interprets as Kurtz's final judgement, maybe of his life choices, maybe of Life itself: "The horror! The horror!" (100). Marlow can hear those words echoing around him, but he—debatably—lies to Kurtz's intended, answering that "the last word he pronounced was—your name" (110). Marlow is standing inside a sarcophagus, talking to a ghost, and it seems to Marlow "that the house would collapse before I could escape, that the heavens would fall upon my head" (111). Perhaps, as Valls Oyarzun suggest (*Formación* 262-ff), Marlow does not lie. Kurtz's judgement of life in "that supreme moment of complete knowledge" (100) is not altogether different from the moment of supreme (and terrible) knowledge that Marlow experiences when, at the end of his quest, exhausted and sick, he arrives at the sepulchre that has replaced the Chapel Perilous of the medieval myth. He has been to the Fisher King's castle, and even though like a true fearful Perceval, Marlow has not

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to line 60). The symbolist city in Eliot is hence easily related to Conrad's "sepulchral city" (Conrad 102). See, for example, Ian Watt's commentary on the symbolist dimension of *Heart of Darkness* (*Conrad* 180-200), already summarized at the beginning of this chapter.

[65] See p. 207.

[66] As it will be explored in the following chapters, this symbolization of the mythical Waste Land as a metropolis which has become "a machine for living and suppressing life" (Bradbury *Novel* 107), which is inextricable from the Symbolist tradition, is one of the main features of the processes of mythical representation that govern the literature of American modernism in subsequent decades. See, most eloquently, the case of John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* (p. 221).

dared to directly ask the Question, he has received the Answer: "The horror! The horror!" (100).

As it will be further explained in the chapters of this thesis that explore the reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth in twentieth-century Arthurian literature, this moment in Conrad's narrative preludes the fundamental characteristic of the recreated myth that will proliferate after T. S. Eliot's explicit recovery of the Arthurian myth in *The Waste Land*.[67] As the reputed myth-critic Joseph Campbell argued, "the problem of the Grail hero will therefore be: to ask the question relieving the Maimed King in such a way as to inherit his role *without* the wound" (*Mythologies* 424).[68] Following Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, Campbell argues that it is the knowledge "of the primal precondition of life ('All life is sorrowful!')" (424) that causes the King's ailing condition. Marlow does receive the answer, but he also inherits the wound. He knows "the horror" but cannot support such knowledge. Moreover, he even fails to inherit the role of king. As explained, the Frazerian sacrificial rite of succession is not completed and, consequently, the pattern and ultimate significance of the Waste Land myth is frustrated. Marlow's mythical quest is functional for the understanding of the narrative of *Heart of Darkness*, but insofar as he fails to relieve the king (arguably, misapprehending Kurtz as a Grail figure, instead of recognizing him as a Fisher-King figure); fails also to kill him and succeed him, and fails to redeem the colonized wilderness, the myth is effectively and rather explicitly reinterpreted so as to narrate a story of degeneration, extricated from the cyclical time of rebirth and renewal. Jacques Darras summarized this mythical change:

> The game is no longer worth playing. In other words, this whole long adventure in space and through space is no longer valid. There will no longer be white against black, Galahad against the wicked knights. White and black are associated indissolubly. In order to come to this, was this long chain of desires and were these lights on the plan disguised as torches of progress, 'running blaze', really necessary? Because, from the very beginning, you see, the outcome was a foregone conclusion: 'We live in a glimmer of light' (43).

[67] As it will be discussed in the following chapter, the fact that Eliot chose this exact excerpt of Conrad's novel as an epigraph for his poem eloquently expresses the relationship between Kurtz's transference of knowledge to Marlow, so to speak, and the reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth that will take place from the 1920s onwards in the American literary tradition.

[68] This interpretation of the Waste Land myth was briefly mentioned in the previous chapter (154) and will be explored in more detail in later chapters. See p. 319 and p. 376.

As Darras notes, light and darkness have become indissoluble, as civilization is but a "fickler" (Conrad 8) of light among the all-enduring darkness. They can no longer be understood as opposite ends of the spectrum traversed by the movement of romance, from darkness and struggle (or Waste Land) to light and plenty (or Eden). For Marlow's (ironically) knightly quest begins in a fickler of light that followed darker times, but when it ends, even the flicker has faded, for it is the river Thames and not the Congo that "seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness" (111). Such is the end of Marlow's quest and, consequently, the (alleged) restorative energy of the romance mode is drastically undercut. The core meaning of the myth is overtly subverted and hence myth itself is once again invalidated as a true and legitimate explanation of the world. Mythical reinterpretation in *Heart of Darkness*—the epitome of the last manifestations of the romance mode in nineteenth-century British literature—demonstrates what philosophy would argue in the second half of the twentieth century: Enlightenment is untrue, and so are its legitimizing narratives.

In Conrad's novella, the enlightened ideal that supported the colonizing endeavour is codified into a traditional mythical narrative: the romance quest. Such quest structures the narrative, constitutes its core. But as Marlow always knew, "the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visibly by the spectral illumination of moonshine" (8). The meaning of Conrad's text is not at its core, either; the meaning is not to be found in the mythical quest adventure. The meaning is held in the misty haze that surrounds the structure of the tale, made up of constant, recurrent images of death, sickness and gloom, which permeate every stage of Marlow's journey in search of Kurtz, from the sepulchral city, into the wilderness, and back again to the sepulchral city.

The core of *Heart of Darkness* is the climax of its mythical structure: the transference of knowledge from the Maimed King to the Grail Knight; that is to say, Kurtz's final judgement: "The horror! The horror!" (100). The meaning of such supreme knowledge of life, as inherently and inescapably *horrible*, however, is found in the symbolization of every stage of Marlow's journey. The horror is not simply the unspeakable knowledge that Kurtz has acquired after his communion with the wilderness. The horror is the sepulchral city inhabited by ghosts; the sick exploited natives employed by the trading company; Kurtz's spectral intended; Marlow's own

sickness; the crawling steamboat that identified Marlow's knightly progress into the wilderness as the "last flickers of a life" (55). If the progression of romance leads the hero from darkness to renewal, the quest myth of the Grail, as it is represented in *Heart of Darkness*, narrates an aimless circular movement that, ultimately, only allows for the contemplation of the last flickers of life, as the running blaze of civilization, Enlightenment, and the myths of eternal restoration that articulate such ideals in the form of traditional narratives, finally vanish into darkness. Regeneration is once again not possible. Time is not cyclical anymore. Time is a flicker of light—"may it last as long as the earth keeps rolling" (8), but never longer. The flicker will vanish. The sun will die out. And the world will go to waste, without the hope of an eventual rebirth. Hence, the reinterpretation of the pre-modern myth of the Waste Land, from a myth of eternally-recurrent restoration into a myth representing degeneration and the irredeemable extinction of all forms of life, actually undercuts the Victorian ideal of progress,[69] "a secular religion" (Wright 4) that has made of progress a myth "in the anthropological sense" (4). In the literary sense, however, progress is not a myth, as it is not a story. Progress is the belief articulated through the myth that is reinterpreted from the eighteenth century onwards to articulate the power ideologies of the dominant classes of bourgeois capitalism. Specifically, as far as *Heart of Darkness* is concerned, the ideal of progress is articulated through the myth of the Waste Land, but insofar as the meaning of the myth is radically altered, the ideal articulated by the myth is ineluctably undermined.

Myth is already known to be malleable. It can be rearranged so as to express different meanings and consequently progress is no longer an unquestionable truth. Hence, the reinterpretation of the quest romance in Conrad's novella paves the way for the crucial role that the myth will play to give account of the subsequent modernist crisis, summarized by Michael Levenson as "the loss of faith, the groundlessness of value, the violence of war, and a nameless, faceless anxiety" (*Modernism* 5). And perhaps, in its transformative (and arguably subversive) representation of this myth of romance, it can be hypothesized that the proto-modernist novel that gives shape to such ideological crisis in fact "developed out of the adventure tradition as much as setting itself in opposition to the form" (Jones 407).

[69] Sydney Pollard defines this ideal, pretty concisely, as "the assumption that a pattern of change exists in the history of mankind... that it consists of irreversible changes in one direction only, and that this direction is towards improvement" (qt. in Wright 3).

PART III
THE WASTE LAND

REPRESENTATION AND REINTERPRETATION OF THE WASTE LAND MYTH IN AMERICAN MODERNISM

CHAPTER 7

POST-WAR MYTHOPOEIA: T.S. ELIOT'S *THE WASTE LAND*

MYTH-RITUALISM AND THE MULTIPLICITY OF SYMBOLS

The objective of this chapter is to advance a myth-critical study of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) that explores the process of reinterpretation of the medieval myth of the Grail in the poem, by focusing on examining the different forms adopted by the myth in the text. In order to optimize such a myth-critical analysis, it is useful to begin the argument by following the poet's instructions and revising thus the critical sources (already mentioned here and there throughout this study) that he identifies as fundamental references for the myth as it represented in the poem. For as Eliot explains in his first note to the poem:

> Not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston's book on the Grail legend: *From Ritual to Romance* (Cambridge). Indeed, so deeply am I indebted, Miss Weston's book will elucidate the difficulties of the poem much better than my notes can do; and I recommend it (apart from the great interest of the book itself) to any who think such elucidation of the poem worth the trouble. To another work of anthropology I am indebted in general, one which has profoundly influenced our generation; I mean *The Golden Bough* (…) Anyone who is acquainted with these

> works will immediately recognise in the poem certain references to vegetation ceremonies. (Eliot; *TWL* 21)[1]

A majority of Eliot critics have agreed over the decades that the influence of Jessie Weston's seminal *From Ritual to Romance* (1920) was rather limited in the actual composition of the poem, since it is well known that Eliot had written several episodes of the poem before he knew of the existence of Weston's book.[2] However, it seems reasonable to argue that the choice of the 'waste land' as the governing metaphor of the poem was in fact influenced by a conscientious reading of Weston's book, for her myth-ritualist study of the Grail legend—which, as it is inherent to myth-ritualism and has been repeatedly mentioned, argues for the ritualistic origin of the medieval myth—stands out among the common practice in Arthurian Studies up until then by critically focusing on the mytheme of the Waste Land, which for the first time in the tradition of Arthurian scholarship is critically considered as representing the core meaning of the Grail myth. Weston writes:

> The misfortunes of the land have been treated rather as an accident, than as an essential, of the Grail story, entirely subordinated to the dramatis personae of the tale, or the objects, Lance and Grail, round which the actions revolves. As a matter of fact I believe that the "Waste Land" is really the very heart of our problem; a rightful appreciation of its position and significance will place us in possession of the clue which will lead us safely through the most bewildering mazes of the fully developed tale. (Weston 63-64)

As Arthurian experts Lupack and Lupack note, "Eliot no doubt recalled this statement or at least the concept behind it, the centrality of the wasteland to a series of myths, for which the idea of the wasted land and the need for its restoration serves as a unifying motif" (114-5). Through the many forms that it adopts in the text—and by means of the metaphorical meaning of the many 'waste lands' represented throughout the poem—the myth of the Waste Land unifies the great complexity of mythical, religious, historical and literary allusions that pervade the poem. Notoriously, F. R. Leavis claimed that "a poem that is to contain all myths cannot construct itself upon

[1] Eliot's notes will be referenced by page number and line reference. Editor Michael North's notes to the poem will be referenced as other editorial notes in previous chapters, indicating the line number followed by the abbreviation 'n'. North's notes to Eliot's explanatory comments will be referenced by page number and note number. Direct quotations from the poem will of course be referenced by line numbers, as it was also the case when referencing the plays examined in the first part of the present study and Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* in chapter 5.

[2] As Michael North explains, Grover Smith, among other critics who also examined Eliot's copy of *From Ritual to Romance*, noted that several pages were uncut and most likely unread (21, n. 2).

one" (92); yet *The Waste Land*—even though not construed solely upon one single myth—is built upon the guiding meaningful elements that make up the Waste Land myth as it has been represented throughout tradition, namely: the theme of illness, the topics of sterility and impotence, the narrative structure of the quest, the trope of the king's sacrificial death, the cyclical movement of the seasons and the passage of natural time, the communal longing for regeneration, etc.[3] After Weston's study, moreover, the Waste Land myth is inextricable from its alleged ritualistic origin, which justifies the presence of ritual references in the poem; and, besides, most images, symbols and mythical referents in the poem are easily traceable to Weston's elucidation about the transition from ritual to romance undergone by the Waste Land myth throughout the centuries. Thus, throughout the myth-critical reading carried out along this chapter, other elements besides the symbols, characters and episodes explicitly taken from the Arthurian legend will be considered as mythical referents that represent and reinterpreted the myth of the Waste Land; because, from a myth-ritualist perspective, which is fundamental in order to interpret the mythical dimension of the poem, every rite of sacrifice is an inherent part of the myth into which the ritual of regeneration will be (eventually) transformed.

Thus in *The Waste Land*, the various Maimed-King figures that populate the text are often paralleled by several incarnations of the divine king of the sacrificial rituals described in Frazer's *The Golden Bough*—also alluded to by Eliot in the afore-quoted note as a fundamental source of the poem—for such parallelisms in fact coincide with Weston's fundamental claim that:

> …there is no longer any shadow of a doubt that in the Grail King we have a romantic version of that strange mysterious figure whose presence hovers in the shadowy background of the history of our Aryan race; the figure of a divine or semi-divine ruler, at once god and King, upon whose life, and unimpaired vitality, the existence of his land and people directly depends. (62)[4]

[3] Since Weston's study of the Grail Legend is in fact a myth-ritualist study, and, as explained in previous chapters, the myth-and-ritual school argues that all myths are in fact the narrative evolutions of one original myth that is itself the script of ritual (see p. 16), Leavis's statement may also be challenged by arguing that, from the perspective of myth-ritualism that certainly influences the process of mythical representation in the poem, all myths can, in fact, be present in a poem that is built solely upon one.

[4] Later on she elaborates, explaining that "if we consider the King, apart from his title, we find that alike from his position in the story, his close connection with the fortunes of his land and people, and the varying forms of the disability of which he is the victim, he corresponds with remarkable exactitude to the central figure of a well-recognized Nature ritual, and may therefore justly be claimed to belong *ab origine* to such a hypothetical source" (123).

The presence of the Fisher King in the poem is explicit in several passages, to the point that, for a critic such as Girri, editor of a bilingual edition of the poem published in Argentina, the poetic voice in the poem is in fact the voice of the Fisher King, who functions as archetype and double of every other character.[5] From the perspective of this study it cannot be consistently argued that the Fisher King is either an archetype of *every* character in the poem, or that he articulates, as an individual self, the many voices in the poem.[6] However, it is undoubtedly true that the presence of the Fisher King is crucial in different episodes of the poem, in which he truly operates as a paradigmatic model for a high number of characters. After all, in a myth-critical analysis, the physical and spiritual sterility recreated in the poem must be initially interpreted as the consequence of the Fisher King's malady, and thus he must be either healed or successfully succeeded (after being sacrificially killed) so that the Waste Land can be restored.

Both scenarios (the healing and succession of the king) are repeatedly represented in the poem, and both scenarios are portrayed as ultimately vain and futile. However, since narratives of succession that climax around the motif of 'killing the king' are far more common in the literary tradition that reinterprets the myth of the Waste Land, as described in previous chapters, scenes of sacrificial killings are also more numerous in *The Waste Land*, where the deaths of sacrificial victims such as the Phoenician sailor in "Death by Water," Jesus Christ in "What the Thunder Said," or Stetson in "The Burial of the Dead," are only the most well-known among several examples. Regenerative rites

[5] "La voz del poema es siempre la del Rey Pescador, arquetipo de todos los personajes, cada cual confundiéndose en el que le sigue, cada cual en el brete de una experiencia negativa comparable" (in Eliot *La Tierra Yerma* 8).

[6] Eloquently, as it is known, Eliot's working title for the poem was "He Do the Police in Different Voices," an allusion to Charles Dickens's last novel, *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), and to the character Sloppy, who, as Blistein argues, is similar to the dissociated poetic self of *The Waste Land* because both speak in 'different voices' as "the result of rootlessness and impoverishment that have deprive [them] of [their] own" (203). Significantly, Blistein notes, one of the major themes of Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* is precisely 'death by water' which, as in *The Waste Land*, is not represented in any way as regenerative, for the victims of death by water in Dickens's text are desecrated by the scavenger Hexman, who fishes out dead bodies in the river Thames to rob them of the gold they may carry. In *The Waste Land*, the Thames-maidens in "The Fire Sermon" are represented as the Rhine-maidens of Wagner's *Die Götterdämmerung*, in which the maidens lose their gold in the river (North in Eliot TWL 14, n. 7). Meaningfully, besides, and as it will be argued further on, the notion of material gain as the only (perverse) restorative quality of death by water is also conveyed in Eliot's text by the leitmotif 'Those are pearls that were his eyes'—the quotation taken from Ariel's song in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Hence, as it can be observed, the parallels between Eliot's poem and Dickens's last novel are thus functional and recurrent; yet, even as Dickens's novel establishes that the contemporary forces of materialism and greed "must end upon the dust heaps of the inevitable 'decline and fall'" (Blistein 206), it must also be taken into consideration that "while the mountainous waste of *Our Mutual Friend* is eventually cleared, and the land purified and renewed, Eliot's waste remains an abiding reality" (206).

of sacrifice do recur frequently in the poem, but they are always in vain. The death of the divine king of mythology is meant to purge the malaise that afflicts the Waste Land and those who live in it, but in the contemporary world that follows the unprecedented horrors of First World War, more acutely than ever before, regeneration is no longer the end result of the Waste Land myth as represented in the literature of Anglo-American modernism. For the myth is now overtly represented a myth of ineluctable *degeneration*.

Yet such reinterpretation of what was, in origin, a myth of eternal regeneration, takes varied forms in Eliot's poem. It is carried out mostly by the *multiplication* of symbols that represent the myth, a phenomenon directly influenced by the notion of myth advanced by the myth-and-ritual school of thought, which was predominant in the intellectual spheres of the 1910s and 1920s.[7] Myth-ritualism transformed the notion of myth itself. As Robert Segal explains, "myth is commonly taken to be words, often in the form of a story. A myth is read or heard. It says something. Yet there is an approach to myth that deems this view of myth artificial. According to the myth and ritual, or myth-ritualist, theory, myth does not stand by itself but is tied to ritual. Myth is not just a statement but an action" (*Myth* 61). This notion is relevant because, from the perspective of myth-ritualism, myth is necessarily transcendent, as it is inextricable from ritual and thus encodes a magical meaning, which is explicitly identified with guaranteeing the survival of the community whose religion and social relationships are arbitrated by such ritual. The social functionality of myth is thus emphasized, as myths are theorized as an inseparable component of the mysticism that protects the wellbeing of the community. Hence, as Walton Litz argues, the Grail legend as retold by Jessie Weston supplies not a plot but "a structure of values (or, if you will, a ritualistic norm)" (6). This "ritualistic norm" of the myth—that is, the set of communitarian values articulated *in* the myth—are represented rather overtly in *The Waste Land*, but the degenerative reinterpretation of the myth in the poem cannot but suggest that the community that inhabits the mythical Waste Land as recreated in Eliot's poem—that is, the survivors of First World War, in the broadest sense of the expression—might in fact not survive after all.

[7] See p. 16.

THE POST-WAR WASTE LAND

As explored above, the pre-modern myth of the Waste Land narrates the story of a *temporary* plight that affects a *cursed* land after the king is wounded and incapacitated. Recovery is the conclusion of the story, and the crisis that afflicts the Waste Land is always represented as temporary. Yet this is not the case of the reinterpreted myth that is subverted in post-medieval texts so as to challenge the dominant ideological discourses it articulates; and, in modernism, this *degenerative* representation of the myth that has been prefigured all throughout modernity reaches its paroxysm. The historical, moral and spiritual consequences brought about by the First World War result in a generalized feeling of spiritual distress that makes manifest the hopeless awareness of the impossibility of regeneration for the contemporary world. If in the medieval sources the restoration of the land's fertility brings along the communal restoration of peace and social welfare, for these too are sympathetically bound to the capacity and power of the divine king of the myth, in *The Waste Land* the restoration of the earth's fertility is explicitly identified with an act of *cruelty*. The meaning conveyed by the iconic line "April is the cruellest month" (Eliot *TWL* 1) is perverse in its apocalyptic undertones: the earth regenerates, at last; but the redemptive quality of such regeneration has morphed into a manifestation of the cruelty of the war-ravaged, wasted world that remained wrecked after the armistice of 1918. The physical rebirth of the Waste Land is no longer alienated from the social circumstances of a world burdened by corruption or spiritual decay; it has become actively cruel, insofar as it perpetuates a lifeless, deathful existence that stands in as the semantic opposite of eternal renewal.

As it is well known, T. S. Eliot advocated for the use of pre-modern myth to set in order and give meaning to the chaos of the contemporary world. In his seminal essay "Ulysses, Order and Myth," he wrote:

> In using myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him (…) It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history (…) Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method. It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible for art, toward order and form. (426)

The use of myth as a structural device in contemporary literature provides, no doubt, a sense of *order*.[8] Yet, one may detect a rhetorical trap in the argument that myth—in this case, *pre-modern* myth—can in fact restore order into the chaos of the modern world. The argument ignores the effects that the re-usage of a pre-modern myth to articulate the concerns and anxieties of the contemporary world has upon the myth itself. In other words, the notion that pre-modern myth can be used to set in order the chaotic contemporary world in art does not take into consideration the unavoidable transformation in the meaning of a myth that is effectively *reshaped* and *rewritten* so that it gives account of the modern, chaotic world. Because only a myth that has been set out of order can truly be reassembled to articulate the endemic chaos of the modern condition, and thus *The Waste Land*, in truth, "treats myth, history, art and religion as subject to the same fragmentation, supportable, and degradation as modern life—nothing transcends the effects of finitude and change brought on by the regeneration of April" (Davidson 123).

Walton Litz, in the previously referenced essay, quotes a letter that Eliot wrote for the magazine The *Dial* in 1921, about Igor Stravinsky's ballet, *Le Sacré du Printemps* (1913). In this letter, Eliot critiqued that "the Vegetation Rite upon which the ballet is founded remained, in spite of the music, a pageant of primitive culture (…) In everything in the *Sacre du Printemps*, except in the music, one missed the sense of the present" (cit. Litz 19).[9] For Eliot, as it can be deduced from his commentary on Stravinsky's ballet, the contemporary recreation of myth requires then an *updating* of myth, a transformation that will allow for the myth to convey a "sense of the present," since "in art there should be interpretation and metamorphosis" (19). Myth must then be changed, so that past and present can be juxtaposed; consequently, the transformation of myth and the transmutation of its ideological foundations are necessary requirements so that the "mythical method" can be functional in the modernist texts.

Chaos and order are then no longer understood as incompatible, for both are articulated simultaneously by means of the modernist mythical method. Order can recreate chaos—it goes without saying that *The Waste Land* is a carefully ordered poem about chaos—but, moreover, order, that is, myth, can give meaning to chaos. Langbaum

[8] James Longenbach, for instance, interprets the mythical allusions in *The Waste Land* as operating basically on a structural level in the poem, as "the references to the myth of the Fisher King build the sense of an inexplicable 'under-pattern' in the be verse" (184).

[9] Both Stravinsky's iconic ballet and the issue of its lacking a "sense of the present" will be recovered and (horrifically) updated in Thomas Pynchon's *V.*, and thus will be reassessed as an instance of post-modern mythical representation in chapter 4.5 (see p. 385-386).

has argued that myth functions as the "positive impulse" in Eliot's poem: "the modern situation is unprecedented and meaningless; therein lies the poem's negative impulse. But deep down these people are repeating an ancient drama with ancient meanings; therein lies the poem's positive impulse" ("Walking Dead" 232). Langbaun elaborates:

> The characters in *the Waste Land* (...) are nameless, rounded out, isolated, and have no clear idea of themselves. All they have is a sense of loss and a neural itch, a restless, inchoate desire to recover what has been lost. But in this very minimum of restless aliveness, they repeat the pattern of the Quest. And it is the archetypal Quest pattern, exemplified in the Grail legend, that gives whatever form there is to the protagonist's movement through the poem. (231)

But the quest is ineluctably futile. The movement of the poem, like the quest of the Grail Knight in the Arthurian myth, concludes in the Chapel Perilous in "What the Thunder said," the last canto. The chapel is however empty, and poses no threat: "There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home, / It has no windows, and the door swings, / Dry bones can harm no one" (Eliot *TWL* 388-90). As Lupack and Lupack explain, "with the Chapel divested of its dangers and trials, there is no chance for a hero to prove his courage and virtue, and thus to prove himself worthy of achieving the Grail—if there were a hero, that is" (117). Then, if any heroic deed is actually carried out in the poem, it is ultimately in vain. And yet, as soon as the poetic voice arrives at the chapel, the dry thunder—"There is not even silence in the mountains / But dry sterile thunder without rain" (Eliot *TWL* 341-2)—finally brings down the much-awaited rain: "In a flash of lightning. Then damp gust / bringing rain" (393-394). At the end of the poem, rain falls upon the Waste Land. Physical restoration seems evident; yet spiritual regeneration remains impossible.

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF RESURRECTION

The last part of the poem recreates the words of the thunder: a single syllable, DA, interpreted by the gods as meaning "damyatta," that is, "control;" by the men as meaning "Datta," that is to say, "give;" and, lastly, by the demons as meaning "dayadhvam," which means "pity." Initially, these Sanskrit terms—taken from the *Upanishad*, the sacred books of Hinduism—may be understood as the redemptive

knowledge acquired by Grail Knight at the end of the quest; in other words, "DA" may be read as the poetic equivalent to the mythical Grail. Hugh Kenner explains:

> The quester arrived at the Chapel Perilous had only to ask the meaning of the things that were shown to him. Until he has asked their meaning, they have none; after he has asked, the king's wound is healed and the waters commence to flow again. So in a civilization reduced to 'a heap of broken images' all that is requisite is sufficient curiosity; the man who asks what one or another of these fragments means (…) may be the agent of regeneration. (147)

"What the Thunder Said" begins with the description of a desert: "Here is no water but only rock / Rock and water and the sandy road / The road winding among the mountains above / Which are mountains of rock without water" (Eliot *TWL* vv. 331-4). After the poetic voice has been to the Perilous Chapel, however, it finally rains. It is reasonable then to argue that the word of the thunder is the cause to the land's fertilization. This hypothesis—that the poetic voice acquires the esoteric knowledge transferred by the thunder at the end of the quest, and thus the Waste Land is restored—seems reinforced by the inclusion in the fifth part of the poem of a passage that alludes to the Gospel of Luke. This well-known episode recreates Christ's apparition to the disciples of Emmaus after the Resurrection:

> Who is the third who walks always beside you?
> When I count, there are only you and I together
> But when I look ahead up the white road
> There is always another one walking beside you
> Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded
> I do not know whether a man or a woman
> —But who is that on the other side of you? (359-365)

This apparition of Resurrected Christ seems to complement (and resolve) the first lines of the canto, which apparently recreate the Passion: "After the torchlight red on sweaty faces / After the frosty silence in the gardens / After the agony in stony places (…) I who was living is now dead / We who were living are now dying" (322-30). Taking at face value these references to the Gospel, it certainly seems reasonable to argue that "What the Thunder Said" does poeticize a transition from death to resurrection, from sterility to regeneration, and from drought to plentiful rain.

From this perspective, the episodes of Christ's death and resurrection may be interpreted as referring to Frazer's god of vegetation, that is, to the ritual origin of the

Waste Land myth, for Christ's sacrificial death is in fact meant to redeem humankind, and it is also paralleled in the poem with the fertilization of the literal wasteland described in the fifth canto. Yet the aforementioned passage that supposedly recreates Christ's apparition to the disciple of Emmaus—"Who is the third who walks beside you" (359)—simultaneously refers to a widely different narrative. As Eliot himself explains in a note, those lines "were stimulated by the account of one of the Antarctic expeditions (I forget which, but I think one of Shackleton's): it was related that the party of explorers, at the extremity of their strength, had the constant delusion that there was one more member that could actually be counted" (25). The passage can be found in Ernest Shackleton's *South* (1919), the autobiographical book in which the explorer narrates his "Endurance expedition" to the Antarctic in the years between 1914 and 1916. Shackleton writes: "when I look back at those days I have no doubt that Providence guided us (…) I know that during that long and racking march of thirty-six hours over the unnamed mountains and glaciers of South Georgia it often seemed to me that we were four, not three" (230). Even though in "What the Thunder said" the hooded figure is that of a *third* man, as in the Gospel, and not a fourth, both references work simultaneously insofar as, at least initially, both apparitions seem to embody a manifest Providence. Yet, in spite of Shackleton's certainty that he and his fellow explorers "had seen God in his caramel raptures, [and] heard the text that Nature renders [and] (…) reached the naked soul of man" (226), Eliot characterizes such apparition, as quoted, as being nothing but "a constant delusion." Thus the passage can be argued to refer, simultaneously, to the redemptive resurrection of Christ and to the fevered delusion of an explorer who tatters on the verge of death. In this regard, the stream of consciousness of the poetic voice, right before the apparition of the hooded figure of the third man, is very revealing:

> If there was water
> And not rock
> If there were rock
> And also water
> And water
> A spring
> To pool among the rock
> If there were the sound of water only
> Not the cicada
> And dry grass signing. (Eliot *TWL* vv. 346-54)

The faltering rhythm of these lines (some consisting of just one or two feet), the inconsistent discourse, and the frequent repetitions indubitably recall a nearly-exhausted state of consciousness, which contributes to the interpretation that what seems initially to recreate an apparition of the Resurrected Redeemer, may in fact be understood, upon closer inspection, as a hallucination suffered by the dehydrated explorers who wander the Waste Land. A signifier of resurrection and redemption is thus transformed into an image of exhaustion and disease. But this image carries two divergent meanings: on the one hand, the reference to Shackleton signifies the inevitable failure of heroic action in *The Waste Land*;[10] on the other, it reverses the apparent meaning of resurrection. If, consequently, Christ's redemptive sacrifice is identified with the delusions of a group of explorers in the Antarctic, it follows that the sacrificial death of the divine king that underlies that myth of the Waste Land—and that arguably gives meaning to the myth—should be read, in the context of Eliot's poem, as a *vain* rite of sacrifice.

In fact, all rites in *The Waste Land* are represented as vain, as illustrated by the presence of the Tarot in the poem. The Tarot also stands in as a signifier that represents nature rituals of fertility in the poem; Weston explained: "the original use of the 'Tarot' would seem to have been, not to foretell the future in general, but to predict the rise and fall of the waters which brought fertility to the land. Such use would bring the 'Suits' into line with the analogous symbols of the Grail castle (…) which we have seen to be connected with the embodiment of the reproductive forces of nature" (80). Indeed, Tarot cards are divided into four suits: Cup, Lance, Sword and Pentangle (Dish), which do seem to correspond with the central symbols of the Grail myth: the Cup, the Lance, the Dish and the Sword (79). These symbols, in Weston's view, make up "a group of 'Fertility' symbols, connected with a very ancient ritual, of which fragmentary survivals alone have been preserved to us" (80). Precisely, *The Waste Land* gives account of these fragments of an ancient ritual that have survived but that, ineluctably, have also been trivialized by modernity, by means of the Tarot. The Tarot, which according to Weston

[10] Shackleton meant to traverse the Antarctic by foot but his ship, the *Endurance*, was trapped in the ice before he could reach the continent. After months drifting on the ice, Shackleton and the rest of the crew sailed to the inhospitable Elephant Island on lifeboats, and from there risked an open-boat journey to the remarkably distant South Georgia. There Shackleton and his men attempted a harrowing land crossing of the island, concluding a survival adventure which was recreated in the travel narrative *South* as the epitome of epic achievement. Yet it is the epic story of a failure. Shackleton's great imperial Trans-Antarctic expedition did not even begin, and thus functions in Eliot's poem as a reference to the failed quest of the mythical Grail Knight. This hypothesis is reinforced by the fact that the Shackleton reference undercuts the meaning of resurrection seemingly conveyed by the reference to Christ's apparition to the disciples of Emmaus after the Resurrection.

"has fallen somewhat into disrepute, being principally used for purposes of divination" (78) is however represented paradoxically in the poem (Brooks 209). That is to say, Tarot in the poem actually dramatizes the conflict it emblematizes (the contemporary trivialization of ancient esoteric rites) because in the poem the Tarot functions as a truly esoteric ritual, but also symbolizes the lost mysticism of that ritual. For just as in Antiquity the Tarot was used to predict the water rising in springtime, in Eliot's poem, the fortune-teller Madame Sosostris—"Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante, / had a bad cold" (Eliot *TWL* 43-44)—also predicts the rise of the waters. But in the contemporary, death-ridden world recreated in *The Waste Land*, the rising waters foretold by the Tarot card do not bring along the fertilization of the land, but cause only more death. Madame Sosostris is very clear in her warning: "Fear death by water" (55), she cautions, effectively transforming the announcement of regeneration brought about by the Tarot cards into an admonition for destruction. The only teleological effect of what was in origin a communitarian ritual that favoured the long-awaited regeneration of the crops is now the pointless warning of an unstoppable catastrophe. Because paradoxically, Brooks explained, "the 'fortune-telling' which is taken ironically by a twentieth-century audience becomes true as the poem develops—true in a sense in which Madame Sosostris herself does not think it true" (207). Madame Sosostris reveals a very illustrative set of Tarot cards in the first canto:

> …Here, said she,
> Is your card, the drowned Phoenician Sailor,
> (Those are pearls that were his eyes, Look!)
> Here is Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks,
> The lady of situations,
> Here is the man with three staves, and here the Wheel,
> And there is the one-eyed merchant, and this card,
> Which is blank, is something he carries on his back,
> Which I am forbidden to see. I do not find
> The Hanged Man. Fear death by water. (46-54)

The fact that the Tarot as it is represented in the poem has been devoid of any trace of mysticism is made evident because most of these cards are not actual Tarot cards. And yet, the fortune-telling becomes true, because Madame Sosostris's seemingly ludicrous cards do in fact correspond to characters and episodes in the poem. Eliot explains in a note:

> I am not familiar with the exact constitution of the Tarot pack of cards, from which I have obviously departed to suit my own convenience. The Hanged Man,[11] a member of the traditional pack, fits my purpose in two ways: because he is associated in my mind with the Hanged God of Frazer, and because I associate him with the hooded figure in the passage of the disciples to Emmaus in Part V The Phoenician Sailor and the Merchant appear later; also the 'crowds of people,' and Death by Water is executed in Part IV. The Man with Three Staves (an authentic member of the Tarot pack) I associate, quite arbitrarily, with the Fisher King himself. (Eliot *TWL* 22)

The Tarot characters are the characters of *The Waste Land*. As Eliot explains in a different note, the Merchant "melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples" (23). That is why the direct reference to *The Tempest*—in the form of the quotation from Ariel's song, "Those are pearls that were his eyes"—appears immediately after Madame Sosostris picks out the card of the Phoenician sailor. And indeed, almost every character and scene depicted in the poem recalls the apparently absurd predictions of Madame Sosostris, which allows for the hypothesis that, in spite of the debasement of ritual in the contemporary world, the Tarot cards are in fact correct in predicting the events that take place in the poem, so by the time that the reader has reached the ending, having confirmed the truth of Madame Sosostris's predictions, they cannot but take into account her final warning and thus fear death by water. The Tarot hence predicts the rise of the waters, as it was meant to do originally. But the nefarious effects of the debased ritual are inescapable: the regenerative waters foretold by the ancient ritual practice have become, in the contemporary world, an unstoppable and annihilating flood. Thus the poem raises expectations of restoring the preternatural magic of ritual and immediately thwarts them; ultimately, all that remains is the warning of an inevitable and non-redeeming death.

[11] The Hanged Man is actually the card that Madame Sosotris does not see: "I do not find / The Hanged Man" (54-5). And yet, insofar as the Hanged Man represents Frazer's sacrificial god-king, the Tarot character is in fact present in the pack, for as it will be explained later on, some characters that appear in these cards, such as the Phoenician sailor, are in fact Fisher-King figures in the poem.

DEATH BY WATER

The trivialization of ritual in *The Waste Land* is inextricable from the reshaping of the mode of romance that can also be traced in the poem. For significantly, Eliot's "debt" to Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* is not limited to his borrowing of a set of symbols from the Grail legend, but also entails the influence of Weston's fundamental claim: the ritual origin of medieval romance. As explored in depth in previous chapters, the 'mode of romance' has been successively transformed by the current of modernity, and has therefore come to articulate the structures and meanings of the primeval rites lying at their core as exercises in futility. Consequently, the pattern of a quest romance that may be intuited in the structure of *The Waste Land* cannot but certify the heroic failure that, in the basis of Weston's hypothesis about the ritual origins of romance, functions as the symbolic embodiment of the mystical failure of ritual. Because evidently, a devaluated rite can only evolve into a romance of loss and futility, and thus the knight of romance in the poem takes the form of a modern antihero whose consciousness has shattered—"You cannot say, or guess, for you only know / A heap of broken images" (Eliot *TWL* 21-2)[12]—and disappears beneath the rhetorical impersonality of the poem.[13] The progressive movement of the romance quest, as it was also the case examined in the previous chapter, is no longer traceable in *The Waste Land.* The poem is not a tragedy in five acts that dramatizes a conflict and its final resolution; there is no progressive plot development in the circular poem, and hence there is no possible resolution either. Mayer has noted that "many readers still connect the poem's quest mainly with the traditions of medieval romance (…) [but the poem] has more to do with the Romantic poets' search for meaning and identity than with the Grail quest of medieval legend" (69-70).[14] However, from the perspective of this study, the poetic impersonality of *The*

[12] As explained in chapter 5, the collapse of the myths of romance entails the breakdown of the "Apollonian illusions" (Brashear 30) that protect the integrity of the self against the deleterious apprehension of the unfathomable chaos of reality (see pp. 154-155). Thus the collapse of myth inexorably brings about the dissolution of the modernist self.

[13] As it is well known, T.S Eliot explained his "Impersonal theory of poetry" ("Tradition" 40) with the analogy of the poet as catalyst: "When the two gases previously mentioned are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulphurous acid. This combination takes place only if the platinum is present; nevertheless the newly formed acid contains no trace of platinum, and the platinum itself is apparently unaffected; has remained inert, neutral, and unchanged. The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum. It may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but, the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material" (41).

[14] The internalization of the medieval quest-romance in the literature of Romanticism and its later re-externalization in Modernism was famously explained by Harold Bloom: "The movement of quest-

Waste Land actually serves to externalize such romantic quest for meaning, insofar as the poem does not seem to recreate the journey of an individual consciousness and, in effect, it also reutilizes—and re-signifies—the constitutive elements of the medieval myth, such as the Perilous Chapel at the end of the quest and, most expressively, the almost omnipresent figure of the Fisher King.

Of the many Fisher-King figures traceable in Eliot's poem, one of the most relevant is the Phoenician sailor, whose death in the very short fourth canto, "Death by Water," may seem to signify, initially, a redemptive, purifying death by water that is, however, immediately re-signified once the reader recalls Madame Sosostris's warning. For the Phoenician sailor appears for the first time in the poem in one of the fortune-teller's cards, immediately followed, as already noted, by a direct quotation from Ariel's song in *The Tempest*. As Eliot himself explains in the previously quoted note, the Phoenicia sailor stands in as a reference to Ferdinand, Prince of Naples, which identifies the Shakespearean prince with a Fisher-King figure and initiates an elaborate system of double references by means of which all the royal figures in *The Tempest* are in fact identified with the Arthurian Maimed King in Eliot's poem. This system of double references has already been explained in the chapter dedicated to examining *The Tempest*,[15] but it seems necessary to insist on reassessing the traditionally-attributed meaning to the Shakespearian quote in the poem because, conventionally, Ariel's words have been considered to characterize Alonso's death as "a portal into the realm of the rich and strange—a death which becomes a sort of birth" (Brooks 194). This interpretation of the leitmotif "Those are pearls that were his eyes," which follows immediately the first appearance of Phlebas, the Phoenician Sailor, contributes to the argument that Phlebas's death by water—he is drowned, as Ferdinand believes Alonso to have died[16]—is in fact redemptive, as it may be identified with the regenerative death

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romance, before its internalization by the High names Romantics, was from nature to redeemed nature, the sanction of redemption being the gift of some external spiritual authority, sometimes magical. The Romantic movement is from nature to the imagination's freedom (sometimes a reluctant freedom), and the imagination's freedom is frequently purgatorial, redemptive in direction but destructive of the social self. (…) The quest is shadowed by a spirit that tends to narrow consciousness to an acute preoccupation with self. This shadow of imagination is solipsism (…) Modernist poetry in English organized itself, to an excessive extent as a supposed revolt against Romanticism, in the mistaken hope of escaping this inwardness (thought it was unconscious that this was its prime motive)" (5-6).

[15] See Chapter 3, note 70, p. 101.

[16] As seen, Eliot specifies that the Phoenician Sailor reminds him of Ferdinand, but both the quotation from Ariel's song and Phlebas's death by drowning identify him as counterpart of Alonso, King of Naples. This double identification of Phlebas—who, as counterpart of Adonis, as explained in the following note, functions as referent to the Frazerian sacrificial god-king and thus as a Fisher-King figure—with Ferdinand *and* Alonso simultaneously corroborates the characterization of both characters as

of the vegetation god that is meant to bring about the restoration of the land's fertility.[17] But once again, the expectations of regeneration initially alluded to by a passage in the poem are immediately thwarted since, for one, the Phoenician Sailor (counterpart of Adonis, the Phoenician god of vegetation and thus a Fisher-King figure) also takes the form of a different character in Eliot's text: Mr. Eugenides, the merchant from Smyrna, as indicated by Eliot in a note.[18] The correspondence between both characters is not entirely random. As Weston explained, Syrian merchants introduced in Europe the esoteric mysteries she establishes as the source of the Grail legend (169). However, in the poem, the introduction of such mysteries is replaced by a sexual offer when the eastern merchant "asked me in demotic French / To luncheon at the Cannon Street Hotel / followed by a weekend at the Metropole" (Eliot *TWL* 212-214). The exchange of esoteric knowledge between the western and the eastern worlds that allegedly originated the Grail legend and its associated mysteries is thus transformed in the modern world into the representation of a frustrated homosexual encounter, establishing a new form of empty worship in which, as Brooks argued, the end is not life "but, ironically, sterility" (197). As it was also the case with the hooded figure in "What the Thunder Said,", the polysemic nature of the Phoenician sailor as referent—embodying Adonis, the god of vegetation; Mr. Eugenides; Ferdinand, and Alonso—undermines the assumption that his death by water should be interpreted as regenerative, for Mr. Eugenides—yet another Fisher-King figure inasmuch as he stands in as representative of a non-generative sexuality—also represents the contemporary devaluation of ancient mysticism. The meaning of Ariel's song as a leitmotif associated to the Phoenician sailor is thus

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doubled Fisher-King figures in "The Fire Sermon," when the poetic voice, identifiable with the Fisher King that reappears at the very end of the poem, describes: "On a winter evening round behind the gashouse / Musing upon the king my brother's wreck / And on the king my father's death before him " (*TWL* 190-192). As explained in chapter 3 (p. 101), the simultaneous reference to Ferdinand and Alonso is further on complicated by the simultaneous identification of the poetic voice with Ferdinand, speaking of "the king my father's death;" and Antonio, musing about "the king my brother's wreck." The identification of the Fisher King with Antonio is crucial because it characterizes him and his brother Prospero as Maimed King figures indistinguishable from Alonso and Ferdinand—the supposed young redeemer of Prospero's kingdom in *The Tempest*—and it is made especially noteworthy by the fact that the line "Musing upon the king my brother's wreck" is a deliberate transformation of Shakespeare's line "Weeping again the King my *father*'s wrack" (Eliot *TWL*, 192n). Given that Ferdinand has no brothers, the identification of the poetic voice with Antonio, whose brother Prospero he believes to have died in a shipwreck, is more than evident in Eliot's text. As explained in chapter 3, all royals from *The Tempest* as represented in Eliot's poem as Maimed-King figures, which effectively exposes Shakespeare's romance as a tale about the impossibility of social, political and spiritual regeneration.

[17] In the context of the poem, the Phoenician sailor is also identifiable with the old Phoenician god Adonis, for effigies of this god were thrown to the sees during the celebration of fertility rites in Ancient Greece (Weston 47).

[18] "…the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor" (*TWL* 23).

revealed as signifying not regeneration, but a transmutation from life into beautiful but static *lifelessness*, as already argued in the previous study of Shakespeare's last play.[19]

THE KING OF CHESS

Eloquently, Ariel's song also features in the second canto, "A Game of Chess," completing a scene of frustration and neurasthenia in which a man and a woman are portrayed as unable to communicate with one another. Shakespeare's line interweaves with the anguished thoughts of a distraught character—"Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?" (Eliot *TWL* 126)—who seems to be trapped in a decomposing, putrefying environment: "I think we are in rats' alley / where the dead men lost their bones" (115-6). Ariel's song, in this context, perpetuates the atmosphere of the scene that opens this second canto, a scene in which life is *petrified*, as it presents Queen Cleopatra sitting in her throne and characterized through a description in which, in Kenner's words, "all things deny nature" (132). The materials that surround the queen seem to come to life while she remains "savagely still" (Eliot *TWL* 110), trapped in a timeless moment in which desire and paralysis seem to combine as in the iconic image of "dull roots [stirred] with spring rain" (4) that opens the poem. Cleopatra listens attentively to the sound of footsteps on the stairs; she combs her hair and awaits "savagely still." The reference to Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* seems to suggest an impending sexual encounter that is however elided; or rather postponed, if one is to believe Eliot's claim in a note that, in *The Waste Land*, "all the women are one woman" (23). Following such indication, it seems that Queen Cleopatra fuses with the young typist in "The Fire Sermon," who, after the departure of her lover, "paces about her room again, alone, / She smoothes her hair with automatic hand, / and puts a record on the gramophone" (254-6). The parallel between both scenes and characters—opposed as in mirror—seems to suggest that the sexual encounter—"caresses / which still are unreproved, in undesired. / (…) / Exploring hands, encounter no defence; / His vanity requires no response, / And makes a welcome of indifference" (237-238, 240-242)—has done little to relieve the "savage stillness" of the queen/typist, as it is inevitable in a world in which lifeless lust has irreparably replaced generative love. For as Brooks

[19] See p. 102.

explained, "love implies a deferring of the satisfaction of the desire; it implies even a certain asceticism and a ritual. Lust drives forward urgently and scientifically to the immediate extirpation of the desire (…) Needless to say, lust defeats its own ends" (193).

In the Waste Land recreated in Eliot's poem, love and death—like life itself—are always sterile. The first part of the poem, "The Burial of the dead," describes a romantic encounter between "the hyacinth girl"[20] and her lover, which appears framed by two direct quotations from Wagner's opera *Tristan and Isolde*. The quotations in German—"*Frisch weht der Wind / Der Heimat zu, / Mein Irisch Kind, / Wo weilest du?*" (31-34), and "*Öd' und leer das Meer*" (42)—illustrate the degeneration of love from happiness to despair,[21] and thus prelude the scenes of solitary confinement, sterility and sexual frustration that are described in "A Game of Chess," a canto that presents, indeed, a game of chess, but in which all pieces are immobile in "a silent unnerving warfare in which everything hinges on the welfare of the King, the weakest piece on the board, and in this section of the poem invisible" (Kenner 131). The king of the chess game is certainly the weakest piece, nearly immobile, and forced to be inactive and always protected by the other pieces. It is thus certainly reminiscent of the Fisher King of mythology, but in Eliot's poem, as Kenner notes, this king of chess is conspicuously absent. He is in face made manifest through his absence: that is, through the frustrated desires of the 'queens' that are in fact present in the second canto, and whose desires either remain unfulfilled, as in the case of Cleopatra, or have become faded memories. Such is the case of Lil, who is waiting for her husband to come back home after he has been demobbed, anguishing over how to explain that she has spent in an abortion the money he gave her to have her teeth fixed. "He's been in the army four years, he wants a good time," her friend warns; "And if you don't give it him, there's others will," (Eliot *TWL* 149-150). As it can be observed, desire is either projected onto an unattainable future or lost into an irretrievable past. This second canto thus "mix[es] / memory and

[20] It must be taken into consideration that, according to the Greek myth, as Roman and Roman explain, Hyacinthus was a mortal youth from Sparta who died accidentally when a discus thrown by the god Apollo—who was in love with him—was blown off course by the west wind Zephyrus, who, in some versions of the myth, was also in love with Hyacinthus. Apollo failed to revive Hyacinthus, but a bright red flower was born instead from the blood that the young man had bled onto the ground. This flower was the hyacinth (76). The similitude between the Greek myth of Hyacinthus and the Frazerian archetype of a man-god whose death results in the land's rebirth is undeniable, and thus the reference to Hyacinthus stands in as yet another signifier of Frazerian ritual in the poem.

[21] Wagner's opera and Eliot's quotations were already mentioned in chapter 5 to comment on the failures of Arthurian myth to contain and set in order the chaos and anarchy of reality. See p. 155.

desire" (2-3), drawing a pattern in which "desire is [the] center [and] memory is the many echoes in the poem of desire's failure to create anything more than itself. Desire is sterile, and that is why the waste land appertains as the poem's prevailing symbol; for there is nothing more than a barren longing that seeks only its own perpetuation" (Elliot Murphy 64). In "A Game of Chess" there are no fishing kings, no sacrificed vegetation gods, and hardly any desolate landscapes. Instead, the Waste Land recreated in the second canto of Eliot's poem is the spiritual Waste Land of unsatisfied longing, of scenes and memories that give account of desire's absolute failure as a generative force of life.

CORPSES BLOOMING

The fact that the game of chess dramatizes, primarily, a situation of war is a rather eloquent expression of the spirit of *The Waste Land*, because evidently the First World War is the historical root beneath the social, material and spiritual desolation of Europe that is recreated in the poem, and precisely as such it is referred to in the first part of the poem, "The Burial of the Dead." This first canto opens with a scene defined by Armin Paul Frank as "the 'root' consciousness vignette" (43), and concludes with a passage that reveals that this consciousness initially attributed to the roots that revive in the spring is, in fact, the consciousness of the dead bodies that are buried in the ground; that is to say, the consciousness of the war victims. The mythical Waste Land is thus recreated as a real, historical waste land, in which, symbolically, corpses have become seed.[22] In a supreme act of perversion, the dead are represented as putting down roots, while the living are plucked from the earth as a result of war, as it is the case of the group in the Hofgarten (Frank 41). The living, plucked from the land and incapable of putting down roots, plant corpses instead of seeds. It makes sense, after all, insofar as it can be intuited that, after the First World War, only death can germinate in the Waste Land that Europe has become. And so the poetic voice asks a fellow soldier: "'Stetson! / You who where with me in the ships at Mylae! / That corpse you planted last year in your garden, / Has it begum to sprout? Will it bloom this year?"" (Eliot *TWL* 69-72).

[22] As it will be explained in the last chapter of this study, this symbolization of the Waste Land will become literal in the mythical literature of postmodernism and, specifically, corpses will be factually employed as seed in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*. See p. 393.

As Robert Langbaum argues, "the shocking substitution of 'corpse' for 'seed' reminds us that the corpses are a kind of seed, and that this truth was symbolized in the old vegetations rituals. We find gardening satisfying because we unconsciously repeat the ritual by which gods were killed and buried in order that they might sprout as vegetation" ("Characterization" 102). However, from the perspective of this study, the arguable reference to a nature ritual that may underlie this replacement of seeds with corpses, which may initially be interpreted as symbolizing regeneration, is once again quickly reversed. The poetic voice, significantly, recognizes Stetson among the ghostly crowd that flows over the "unreal city:" "A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many, / I had not thought death had undone so many" (Eliot *TWL* 61-2). Stetson, like the rest of the anthropomorphic figures scattered over the city, is essentially dead. He is a ghost who fought in the war next to the poetic voice. The poetic voices recognizes him among the deadly crowd—"Then I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying, 'Stetson! / You who were with me in the ships at Mylae'" (69-70)[23]—and asks him about the corpse he planted after the war. Metaphorically, it is easy to assume that such corpse is in fact one killed by Stetson in battle, which, if subscribing Langbaum's hypothesis about the regenerative force of planting corpses, allows for a reassessment of the (perverse) implications that the corpse's blooming might bring about. For inexorably, the closing lines of "The Burial of the dead"—the poetic voice's warning to Stetson about protecting the dead body he has planted in his garden—recall the first lines of poem, hence providing an explanation for the cruelty of April. Both vignettes describe the reawakening of the earth in spring. The first states the cruelty of the process: "April is the cruellest month," begins the poem; "breeding lilacs out / of the dead land" (1-2). The second vignette reveals the reason why such spring awakening is deemed cruel, by exposing how the lilacs that grow in April feed off the life of the dead bodies buried underground.

Certainly, from a purely anthropological perspective, an image of dead bodies feeding the ground so that flowers can sprout from the earth might be interpreted as signifying resurrection. However, by taking into consideration the contextual reality of the First World War, the image of dead bodies breeding lilacs might be understood as carrying apocalyptic undertones, since the image seems to imply that new life is

[23] The battle of Mylae is battle of the Punic Wars (Eliot *TWL* 70n)—in which, between the third and second centuries, Rome and Carthage fought for the dominion of Europe—which thus operates in the poem as a signifier of the First World War.

ineluctably born out of a land that may not be literally barren, but is indubitably swollen with the death of *millions* of war victims. New life is thus born already swollen with death, and consequently the corpses looking up at the awakening earth from their burial place become in effect undistinguishable from the ghosts of the survivors, to the point that Levenson argued that these corpses in fact possessed "a little life" and thus could rise from their graves and wander the earth in a permanent state of intermediate transit between life and death (Levenson 172), like the "neither / living nor dead" (Eliot *TWL* 39-40) 'hyacinth girl'.[24] From this perspective, there is no difference between Stetson and the corpse that he has planted, because Stetson is one more in a crowd of ghosts that is characterized through two different references to Dante's *Inferno,* i.e., the first part of Dante's fourteenth-century epic poem *Divine Comedy*. The first reference—"I had not thought death had undone so many" (62)—is a reference to Dante's third canto, which takes place before the Gates of Hell, where those awaiting salvation (or condemnation) are expecting their judgement. The second reference to Dante— "sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled (63)"—is taken from the fourth canto, in which Dante descends to the First Circle of Hell, Limbo, where those who died without baptism linger in eternal waiting.[25] Those who live in the Waste Land—the poetic voice, Stetson, the walking corpses that rise from their graves in springtime, etc.—live in state of transit between life and death; but spiritually, they also linger forever somewhere between salvation and condemnation. David Ward has argued that "the waste land of the grail legend, as interpreted by Jessie Weston, is the interval between a death and a birth, the winter of the year and the winter of the soul" (102). In Eliot's poem, once the "winter of the year" has come to pass, those who live in the Waste Land remain trapped without escape in the "winter of the soul." Through the references to Dante's *Inferno*, the Waste Land of medieval mythology is re-signified as eternal and unredeemable. Cleanth Brooks explains:

[24] As previously examined, the notion of being infused with only a "little life" and existing thus in a perpetual state between life and death already appeared in *The Tempest* as characteristic of those who are forced to remain forever trapped in a Waste Land that cannot ever be restored. See p. 105.

[25] Not in vain, the rite of baptism is rather meaningful in the context of *The Waste Land*, for it is a Christian initiation rite of forgiveness that is based on the redemptive nature of water. In a world in which the mysticism of water has been transformed to signify a kind of apocalyptic death that offers no redemption, baptism can only be represented as a futile rite, at best, or as ritual that condemns rather than redeems, at worst. That is why those who live in the Waste Land are identified with those condemned to languish in Limbo: the redemptive force of baptism has also been eradicated by the devaluation of ritual in the contemporary world.

> The Dante and Baudelaire references then, come to the same thing as the allusion to the waste land of the medieval legends; and these various allusions drawn from widely differing sources enrich the comment on the modern city so that it become 'unreal' on a number of levels: as seen through 'the brown fog of a winter dawn'; as the medieval waste land and Dante's Limbo and Baudelaire's Paris are unreal. (190-1)[26]

The modern city recreated in the poem is an unreal space because, as the Limbo of Dante's *Inferno*, modernist literature represents the modern city (as it will be fully examined in the following chapter) as a symbol of the archetypal Waste Land of mythology. Thus the "unreal city" recurs throughout the poem, in the first, third and fifth cantos, and is eventually identified with *all* cities—with *the city* in its most abstract sense: "Jerusalem Athens Alexandria / Vienna London" (Eliot *TWL* 374-375). The "unreal city"—perhaps the most explicit and easily identifiable correlative of the mythical Waste Land in Eliot's poem—is a city haunted by a crowd of ghosts and infested with rats that, in "The Fire Sermon," rattle the bones of the bodies littered all over town. This is the putrid environment where the neurasthenic conversation of "A Game of Chess" takes place, but in the third canto there is only one solitary character in the infested city: a man, fishing as he muses about the deaths of his brother and father, both kings, in a shipwreck.[27] The poetic voice, a brother and a son of kings, is fishing, and thus the identification with the Fisher King becomes explicit. But the Arthurian character has been transported to a present-day Waste Land, where the death-bringing river "sweats / oil and tar" (266-267). The contemporary landscape is however juxtaposed to the image of the river Thames in Edmund Spenser's "Prothalamion" (1596), referenced by a direct quotation—"sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song" (176)—and further on characterized as a river "[which] bears no empty yet another feature, sandwich papers, / silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends / or other testimony of summer nights" (177-179).

As Joseph Frank explains, the passage sets "[a] sense of ironic dissimilarity and yet of profound human continuity between the modern protagonist and their long-dead (or only imaginary) exemplars (...) [which are] locked in a timeless unity that, while it

[26] Eliot explains in the notes that the "unreal city" of *The Waste Land* is his adaptation of Baudelaire's "Fourmillante cité," from his poem "Le sept vieillards" in *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857). The explicit characterization of Eliot's "unreal city" as a *symbolist* city allowed for the association of Eliot's "unreal city" and Conrad's sepulchral city in *Heart of Darkness* that was explored in the previous chapter (see p. 179), and will also remain functional in the representation of Manhattan as an urban waste land in Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer*, as it will be explained in the following chapter (see note 38, p. 217).

[27] See note 85 in this chapter, p. 201.

may accentuate surface differences, eliminates any feeling of sequence by the very act of juxtaposition" (Frank 62-63). The decomposing modern city *is* Spenser's London, as it is Dante's Limbo and Baudelaire's Paris; as it is, ultimately, the mythical Waste Land of Arthurian legend. For the celebrated marriage of Spenser's "Prothalamion" is also present in Eliot's contemporary London, as "The Fire Sermon" poeticizes the already-mentioned sexual encounter—in mythical terms, the ritual union of lance and cup symbolized in the Grail myth, which makes possible the regeneration of the world (Ward 102)—displaced from "A Game of Chess." There is no regenerative energy in the indifferent union between the typist and the "carbuncular" clerk (Eliot *TWL* 231), which ends only in frustration. In that scene, the clerk's explicit sickness stands in as signifier of "the wound of the Fisher King, [which] hints at a more serious affliction that affects him and results in his passionless lovemaking" (Lupack and Lupack 116). Thus the supposedly regenerative union of cup and lance is represented in *The Waste Land* in the form of a sick, frustrated sexual encounter that seems to point out that, in the Waste Land of the contemporary world, all are troubled by the same condition of impotence and sterility that afflicts the Fisher King. There is no place for a king in the formless social structure that is the civilized urban mass, so that in the literary representation of the modern city as a correlative of the mythical Waste Land, all citizens become a stand-in for the Fisher King of mythology.

"I WANT TO DIE"

The medieval Fisher King reappears in the last stanza of the poem, when the poetic voice describes: "I sat upon the shore / Fishing, with the arid plain behind me / Shall I at least set my lands in order? / London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down" (Eliot *TWL* 422-426). The king wonders whether his kingdom will ever be restored, and immediately the text presents the image of the London bridge, "falling down falling down falling down;" and only a handful of lines below, the final line in Sanskrit: "Shantih shantih shantih" (433)—as Eliot translates in a note: "The Peace which passeth understanding" (26). Initially, one may interpret these words as a final moment of redemption, brought about by the regenerative rain and connoting an experience of inexpressible transcendence. Yet the meaning of the last line in the poem is rather

ambiguous, even when subscribing the argument that, in fact, the Sanskrit words "shantih shantih shantih" function as an onomatopoeia that represents as an icon the final falling of the rain that was announced a few lines above.[28] Indeed, the last two lines of the poem—"Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata. / Shantih shantih shantih" (432-433)—are taken from the *Upanishad* and thus written in Sanskrit. For a reader unfamiliar with Hinduism, these last two lines cannot have any transcendental meaning, even if approximately translated in Eliot's notes. Thus the last words of the poem in fact convey a sort of *rhythmical* meaning that is fully integrated within the symbolic map of the poem, as they configure what Eliot himself defined as a "water-dripping form" (qt. in McNelly Kearns 217). In other words, the last two lines of the poem—insofar as they rhythmically recreate the pouring rain—*bring down* the rain meant to restore the land's fertility. However, as argued, the restoration of the land's fertility cannot bring about a true spiritual regeneration for the community hopelessly trapped in the Waste Land. The final words carry a meaning that is almost exclusively phonetically codified, and as such they represent the April drizzle that stirs the dull roots of the lilacs sprouting from the dead bodies of the First World War victims buried underground. The final words of the poem transport readers to the beginning of the text, trapping them amidts the 'neither-living-nor-dead' corpses and ghosts that are condemned to languish eternally in the Waste Land.

Significantly, Eliot had originally chosen as an epigraph to his poem a quotation from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (Valerie Eliot 3); specifically, Kurtz's moment of "supreme knowledge:" "Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge? He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision—he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath— / "The horror! The horror!" (Conrad 99-100). Eloquently, Valls Oyarzun explains this moment as an "infinitesimal chain" (*Formación* 231)[29] in which Kurtz is trapped during that last instant of life, because that last instant in which he revives every moment of his life is an inextricable part of the life that he revives, so that he is forced

[28] See Paul Frank (48), McNelly Kearns (217, 228), and Brooks, for whom the main function of the use of Sanskrit in the poem is precisely onomatopoeic (203).

[29] Supporting his argument on Henri Bergson's conception of time, Valls Oyarzun writes: "…es razonable entender que el momento mismo de la muerte pase también ante sus ojos [de Kurtz] justo antes del segundo final (que podría ser casi eterno siguiendo los preceptos *bergsonianos*), y, continuando con el razonamiento, no hay motivos para dudar de que el hecho de revivir la vida en ese segundo eterno forme parte del recuerdo en sí, con lo que se produce una cadena infinitesimal sobre el *recuerdo* del *recuerdo* del *recuerdo* de la vida que explicaría, en otros términos, el concepto de Nietzsche [de eterno retorno]" (*Formación* 231).

to revive his life again and again and again—eternally—in one single "supreme moment of complete knowledge" that is identified with "the horror."[30] For this moment in which eternal life is captured in an instant is not a triumph over death, but an inexorable (and eternal) return to a life that can only be described as *horrible*. That is what happens when, at the end of the poem, the final drizzle let out by the thunder takes the reader back to enduring the cruelty of April, among "A heap of broken images, where the sun beats, / and the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket not relief, / and the dry stone no sound of water" (Eliot *TWL* 21-23). Rebirth is in fact a return to a "continuum of boredom [in which] (…) the terrible thing is to be compelled to stay alive" (Kenner 136). The reader cannot escape the Waste Land any more than the 'wastelanders' can. On the contrary, the reader must wander in circles, in the company of ghosts and living corpses, always on the verge of extenuation.

The Waste Land is thus mythically coded as recreating a timeless space where every moment can be equated to the final, eternal moment of Kurtz's life; but also to the eternal but deliquescent life of the Cumean Sibyl, whose voice opens the poem in a reference to Petronius's *Satyricon*, written in Latin and Greek and translated by editor North as: "For I once saw with my own eyes the Cumean Sibyl hanging in a jar, and when the boys asked her, 'Sybil, what do you want' she answered, 'I want to die' (Eliot *TWL* 3, n. 1). The Sibyl lives (forever) trapped in a glass jar, because her old body is decomposing, after she asked the god Apollo to grant her as many years to live as there are grains in a handful of sand. She forgot however to ask for eternal youth, and thus she languishes in a state of progressive and irreparable degeneration that makes her wish for death. Her condition functions metonymically to characterize life in the Waste Land of Eliot's poem, where springs brings about the rebirth of the land, year after year, but new life only entails an inexorable return to a perennial state of *living death*. Cyclical time—as represented in the structure of the poem—is indeed eternal; but as in the aforementioned passages from Conrad and Petronius, eternal life is the curse that

[30] This reference to Conrad is not altogether disconnected from Eliot's reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth for, within the mythical structure of *Heart of Darkness*, this moment of complete knowledge corresponds to the climactic moment in the Waste Land myth when, as explained by Joseph Campbell, the Grail Knight acquires the true knowledge of life that has paralyzed the wounded Fisher King. Marlow fails in the completion of his heroic task insofar as he inherits the king's knowledge but cannot endure it and thus falls immediately sick (see p. 180). The characters who inhabit Eliot's Waste Land, inasmuch as they are trapped for ever in "the horror," may also be interpreted as having acquired the true, paralyzing knowledge of life—perhaps the transcendental meaning encoded by "Shantih shantih shantih"—and having fallen sick as a result, for all who live in the Waste Land, trapped in an in-between state of *living death*, are indeed irreparably sick.

plights the Waste Land. The physical regeneration of the land brought about by the passing of the seasons is inexorable, but the stirring of dull roots in the dead land cannot bring about a true redemption for the community. There lies the cruelty of April. As McNelly Kearns argues, the rebirth of vegetation in spring brings along the germination of "the tree of karma, of action and reaction, which unless redeemed by some deep experience out of time can only bear the fruit of endless repetition" (201). Such rebirth is hence "ambiguous" as it "is clearly not a celebration of some joyous spring, but a return to a kind of bondage, a 'clutching' and attachment where 'the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket not relief'" (McNelly Kearns 201). The only possibility for salvation is then to leave the Waste Land, but the circular structure of the poem allows no escape. The mythical quest becomes an aimless, futile wandering across the varied wasted lands of the poem, which in fact embody the "emotional starvation" (Wilson 89) connoted by the text.

Perhaps, then, it may be useful to interpret *The Waste Land* as the negative of a photograph, for the recovery of traditional poetic symbols recurrently brings about a drastic transmutation of their conventionally attributed meanings. Such is, most eloquently, the case of 'spring'. The famous first lines of the poem recall the foundations of the English literary tradition, as they resound with the echoes of the first lines of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*: "What that Aprill with his shoures soote / The droghte of March had perced to the roote, / And bathe every veyne in swich licour / Of which vertu engendred is the flour" (I 1-4). Simultaneously, however, Eliot's lines also recall, inevitably, Whitman's foundational "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," a poem that, as opposed to the poetic voice in Chaucer's Prologue, does not celebrate the joyous coming of spring, but presents the rebirth of the land, breeding lilacs, as the poetic counterpoint to the poetic voice's lament, generated, as in *The Waste Land*, by a context of war and desolation: "WHEN lilacs last in the door-yard bloom'd, / and the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the night, / I mourn'd—and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring. / O ever-returning spring! trinity sure to me you bring; / Lilac blooming perennial, and drooping star in the west, / And thought of him I love" (Whitman 276, 1-6). In *The Waste Land*, the meaning of the spring awakening is imbued with the influence of tradition but, unavoidably, it also *modifies* tradition.[31]

[31] Eliot's seminal "Tradition and the Individual Talent" is a crucial reference to understand how the symbolic meanings of *The Waste Land* both contain and transform tradition, for as Eliot argued:" [Tradition] cannot be inherited, and if you want it your must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the

April, in the poem, contains the traditional meanings attributed by Chaucer, Whitman and their respective traditions; but such meanings—as myth itself—are updated to convey a 'sense of the present'. As in Chaucer's *Tales*, in Eliot's poem April brings along the rebirth of the earth in springtime; as in Whitman's "When Lilacs," the regeneration of April functions as the counterpoint of the poetic self's mourning. Both meanings are juxtaposed in *The Waste Land*, but they are also transformed, since, in Eliot's poem, the poetic voice's lament is not unrelated to the earth's rebirth in April but, in fact its grief is *because of* April. As Ward explains, "April, then, the month of spring flowers and Canterbury pilgrims, is, with deliberate paradox, made 'the cruelest month'; and not cruel by default either; cruel in action, 'breeding', 'mixing', 'stirring', an alchemist or wizard working upon the passive death" (76). In conclusion, to quote Elliot Murphy, *The Waste Land* "deconstruct[s] the traditions upon which it was founded, but only by (…) reconstructing those very traditions for the modern mind" (63).

In *The Waste Land*, the governing symbolic structure that is recovered from tradition is, undoubtedly, the medieval myth of the Waste Land. As it has been explained, the physical sterility that is the thematic cornerstone of the myth, the iconic figure of the Fisher King, and the ritual pattern that underlies the Arthurian tale from a myth-ritualistic perspective recur time and again in Eliot's poem, adopting varied forms and structures. Often, signifiers that refer to the Grail legend have more than one signified, simultaneously; they represent the myth in the text but also reference various artistic, religious, historical and mythological traditions so that "stories from different epochs are suddenly told in an interpretative way, as if they were a single story" (Williamson 155). This "interpretive way" of retelling a story deeply rooted in tradition—the Arthurian myth of the Waste Land—cannot but result into a re-signification of that story, as it has been repeatedly argued throughout this study. Thus, a critical exploration of *The Waste Land* cannot ignore the contemporary context of the

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first place, the historical sense, which (…) involves a perception not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity (…) What happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it (…) The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly altered (…). The past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past" (38-9).

poem that shapes such re-signification, and consequently advance the hypothesis that the updating of the medieval myth carried out in the text so that it conveys a 'sense of the present' brings as a result a poetic, elegiac commentary on the historical, social and moral consequences that the First World War brought along for western civilization. The multiplicity of tones in the poem—satirical, tragic, prophetic, mythical—carry the same expression of lament about a world wrecked by violence and death, which have invaded all spaces and forms of life. Life, in turn, has become an endless, aimless wandering among heaps of (broken) images of sterility, lifelessness, alienation, frustration and miscommunication. Hence, the unstoppable regeneration of all natural life in springtime that punctuates the passage of time as cyclical—a notion inextricably bound to the medieval version and to the (alleged) pre-medieval ritual pattern of the Waste Land myth—can no longer be represented as counterpart of a collective and redemptive spiritual restoration. On the contrary, once the regeneration of the land's fertility is re-signified in the new retelling of the myth as an act of cruelty, the meaning of the myth that, traditionally, had articulated in narrative form a community's collective hopes for eternally-recurrent (social and spiritual) restoration, cannot help but be transformed as well.

The medieval version of the Waste Land myth concluded with the restoration of the community's welfare after the restitution of social and political order. However, the modernist reinterpretation of the myth cannot but represent, mythically, the impossibility of such collective restoration after the unprecedented historical, philosophical and moral desolation brought about by the First World War, which Bradbury and McFarlane categorically described as the "destruction of civilization" (27). That is to say, in conclusion: *The Waste Land* reproduces a traditional myth of *regeneration* but reinterprets it, explicitly, as a myth of inescapable *degeneration*. This process of mythical transformation, as will be explored subsequently in this study, is a fundamental characteristic of the post-war *zeitgeist* recreated in the literature of American modernism, and of the ideological transformations in the practice of mythical representation that such *zeitgeist* brought about.

CHAPTER 8

THE MODERN CITY AS A MYTHICAL WASTE LAND: JOHN DOS PASSOS'S *MANHATTAN TRANSFER*

UNREAL CITY

E. D. Lowry's seminal essay "*Manhattan Transfer:* Dos Passos' Wasteland" argues that a critical exploration of the extensive similarities between T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and John Dos Passo's 1925 novel *Manhattan Transfer* "may help us estimate more accurately the significance of Dos Passos' novel" (53). Indeed, the intertextual relationship between Eliot's poem and Dos Passos's novel is verifiable and relevant for a myth-critical analysis of *Manhattan Transfer*.[32] However, the aim of this study is to transcend the examination of the similarities between both texts so as to explore the process of representation and reinterpretation of the medieval myth of the Waste Land in Dos Passos's paradigmatically modernist text as a differentiated and unique artistic manifestation of the post-war American literary *zeitgeist* that rearranged and re-codified the archetypal Arthurian myth so as to represent the overwhelming degeneration of a whole world become a sort of spiritual and moral wasteland after the "destruction of civilization" (Bradbury and McFarlane 27), brought about by the First World War. In the case of Dos Passos's novel, as it will be explained throughout the chapter, the

[32] In this context, 'intertextuality' is taken to mean 'the actual presence of one text within another' (Genette 2)

modernist reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth takes the form of the symbolization of the modern ("unreal") city as a correlative of the mythical Waste Land that stands in as the aesthetic representation of the chaos, desolation and hopelessness that characterized contemporary existence in the post-war 1920s.

Thus in *Manhattan Transfer*, Manhattan is represented as the wasted, literally *sickened* land that the contemporary world has become, for, in fact, the representation and the understanding of contemporary culture is inextricable from the representation and the understanding of life in the modern city. As Lehan has argued, "the city has determined our cultural fate for the last three hundred years—has become inseparable from our personal and national destiny. As the product of the Enlightenment, urbanism is at the very heart of Western culture, the source both of political order and of social chaos" (Lehan *City* 3). As "the product of the Enlightenment," the social function of the modern city is then not altogether different from the social function of mythology as analyzed throughout this study, and thus, as masterfully represented in *Manhattan Transfer*, the *mythical* representation of the city in modernist literature effectively exposes the simultaneous political order and social chaos arbitrated by the urban-culture institutions that, like mythological thought, govern, control and attempt to set in order the inherent anarchy of the formless, dehumanized and homogenised urban mass where the contemporary individuals fracture, dissolve and disappear.

The representation of Manhattan in Dos Passos's novel seems then to endorse Lehan's claim that "as the city became more materialistic, it engendered a hostility in the literary imagination" (5).[33] Such hostility is made manifest in the literature of American modernism, more acutely precisely in the representation of New York City,[34]

[33] Leslie Fielder concurs, providing a description of the post-industrial city almost undistinguishable from Dos Passos's Manhattan: "Somehow we grow impatient with cities themselves (…) But the dis-ease, the impatient of which I speak, existed in the literature bred by our deepest nightmares long before the Industrial Revolution had radically transformed the more humane *poli* into an impersonal hub of communications, a center for mass production, marshalling yards, slaughter houses, and assembly plants. At first, indeed, that transformation seemed a blessing rather than a curse for the city poor, since it created more work, more goods, and eventually lifted more men and women above the subsistence level. But simultaneously it raised expectations even higher, making those still excluded and deprived ever more aware of their suffering, while rich and poor alike became conscious of the price paid: the growing alienation of all humankind from the natural world in which we first become human, and which in turn we have humanized by making it a part of our essential mythology, the perceptual grid through which we see and understand our identity and destiny" (114).

[34] The prominence of New York City in the processes of *hostile* representation of the modern city in American literature is not however exclusive of Modernism. In fact, the city of New York had become the setting and thematic focus of several key texts in the American literary tradition, from the last decades of the nineteenth century leading up to the decade of 1920. Such is the case of, to name only some among the most relevant in the canon, Henry James's *Washington Square* (1880), Stephen Crane's *Maggie: a*

as noted by Joyce Carole Oates: "New York City," she writes, "—that most *mythical* of cities—tends to emerge in recent literature as hellish, or at any rate murderous" (30, my italics). Such is undoubtedly the case of *Manhattan Transfer*. Insofar as the literary representation of the city may be regarded as a sort of Foucaultian heterotopia[35]—the city in literature is tautologically a symbolic (unreal) representation of a real space (Scott and Simpson-Hausley 335)[36]—the literary recreation of urban spaces is ideologically determined. Hence, as Scott and Simpson-Hausley argue, every literary representation of the city in fact gives account a critique of the social, moral and political conditions of urban life (335). Urban spaces operate primarily as an organizing system that articulates social relationships among the individuals that make up the urban mass, thus the city is represented in literature as a correlative of the set of social and political institutions that arbitrate such relationships between the individual and the urban community.[37] Consequently, the *sickened* city of *Manhattan Transfer* transcends the limits of metaphorical representation—which attributes organic qualities to a *place*—to operate as the *symbolic extension* of the *sickened* individuals that frantically 'swarm' across the streets.[38] Yet, it must also be taken into consideration that this

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Girl of the Streets (1893), Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905), or Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* (1925).

[35] Foucault explains: "There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places - places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society - which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality" (par. 12).

[36] In this regard, Gergerly has argued: "The fictional Manhattan may thus be regarded as transphenomenal—it is not a place in the strict physical or geometrical sense, as it is represented in the novel, but at the same time its transphenomenal character does not at all compel one to draw the conclusion that it is not 'real' or has a non-substantial existence (…) Its *mythic power* can in part be traced back to the fact that this external existence is experienced by all of the city dwellers individually, thus transforming them into a virtual, ideal community, and yet this exteriority remains elusive to each of them" (69-70, my italics).

[37] "We do not live inside a void that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another" (Foucault par. 9)

[38] Manhattan in Dos Passos's novel, like the previously examined instances of Brussels and London in Conrad and Eliot, is another modernist (unreal) reconfiguration of the "fourmillante cite" that was Baudelaire's symbolist Paris (see p. 179 and p. 206). As Pike notes, the city in literature "seems to function primarily as both an emblem and an archetype. As such it has more various and more diffuse associations and resonances than a symbol can generally encompass" (13). The city is then *more* than a symbol in the traditional sense. Arguably, Manhattan functions as a symbolist 'Symbol' in Dos Passos's text, since, far from (solely) representing, realistically, city life as its subject matter and the target of its critique, the novel recreates the city of New York at the turn of the century as a spectacle that reveals, to quote Baudelaire, "the profoundness of life in its entirety" by becoming "the Symbol of it" (qt. in Peyre 27). As it will be explained in depth throughout the chapter, Manhattan in Dos Passos's text does not stand in simply as the literary representation of the real Manhattan, but as an *unreal* city that, as a true *symbolist* Symbol, transforms the mythical recreation of life in New York City into the representation of a "phenomenon" that symbolizes an external "truth" (Fowlie 13) unlimited by the boundaries of the reality

"hellish" characterization of a *sick* city does not take place exclusively in Dos Passos's text, but in fact reveals a more-or-less generalized appreciation of New York at the time that is cognate with the aforementioned explanations provided by Lehan and Oates. Most influential in this regard, perhaps, is the description of Manhattan included in the autobiography of the historian and philosopher Henry Adams:

> The outline of the city became frantic in its effort to explain something that defied meaning. Power deemed to have outgrown its servitude and to have asserted its freedom. The cylinder had exploded, and thrown great masses of stone and steam against the sky. *The city had the air and movement of hysteria*, and the citizens were crying, in every accent of anger and alarm, that the new forces must at any cost be brought under control. Prosperity never before imagined, power never yet wielded by man, speed never by anything but a meteor, *had the world irritable, nervous, querulous, unreasonable and afraid*. (499, my italics)

Henry Adams recalls his arrival in New York on the 15th November 1904, just a few years after the time when the opening scenes of *Manhattan Transfer* take place, and more than two decades before the publication of the novel in 1925. The chronology of the plot in Dos Passos's novel covers over three decades of the main characters' lives, from the late nineteenth century to the 1920s, and it expressively reproduces the recrudescence of all the symptoms of dehumanizing hysteria detected by Adams at the beginning of the century. The mention of hysteria is especially relevant for the purposes of this study, for it presents New York explicitly as a sick city at the beginning of the century; it seems reasonable to argue that, perhaps, two decades later when Dos Passos publishes the novel, such sickness might have been perceived as remarkably more serious—an idea validated by historiographical testimonies such as Leuchtenburg's, who describes New York City in the decade of 1920 as follows:

> The city, rural traditionalists expounded, was the home of the alien and the uprooted Negro, of a people lost to basic American values. 'New York', wrote the Denver Post in 1930, 'has been into a cesspool into which immigrant trash has been dumped for so long that it can scarcely be considered American anymore.' New York was the seat of the Union Theological Seminary and modernism, the home of the nightclub and the gangster, of Wall Street and Tammany Hall (...) It was a city cruel and impersonal, the abode of the rootless, a place where, as one writer noted, 'nobody Seemed To have parents.' [39] (226-7)

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represented in the novel. In this case, that external truth is the collective degeneration of the whole of western civilization in the decade of 1920, which obviously transcends the time and space constrictions of the novel's chronotope.

[39] The quotation is taken from Malcom Cowley's *Exiles' Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s*, a non-

New York, a hysterical city in 1904, has become "the abode of the rootless" by the decade of 1920. It is a place of rootlessness, in which life cannot grow or take roots. It is a waste land, literally and symbolically, because in modernism "the city has become metaphor rather than place" (Bradbury "Cities" 97). The modern city, hysterical and barren, truly functions as setting and metaphor, but it perhaps functions as *more* than metaphor, for the city is in fact the correlative of the sick and spiritually sterile community that inhabits in it. Such community, following Leuchtenburg's characterization of New York City, is primarily defined by its rootlessness, which arguably justifies the use of the Waste Land myth as the main symbolizing strategy. The city—an island made up of concrete and steel, surrounded by "broken water" (Dos Passos 15)—is thus *mythically* represented as a literal and symbolic waste land blighted by decay and putrefaction. In this regard, Fiedler's explanation about the mythologizing of the city in modern literature is particularly eloquent for, as she writes, the city "has proved oddly resistant to any mythic images except for certain negative, dark, infernal ones, which reinforce rather than neutralize our sense of alienation" (114). The mythologizing of the city is thus a *negative* mythologization: a frequent occurrence in the work of authors contemporary to T. S. Eliot, as well as in the work of his predecessors and more immediate successors (Fiedler 115). This notion is indubitably crucial for a myth-critical interpretation of *Manhattan Transfer*, because in the novel the mythologization of New York City—carried out by means of its representation as counterpart of the archetypal Waste Land of medieval myth—is certainly saturated by mythic images that are consistently "negative," "dark" and "infernal."

CITY LIFE AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Manhattan Transfer opens with a description of a ferry arriving in the city: "three gulls wheel above the broken boxes, orangerinds, spoiled cabbage heads that heave between

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fiction book about the so-called 'Lost Generation' of American writers (see p. 287), among whom John Dos Passos was a prominent figure. Cowley writes: "[America] wasn't our country any longer. Nevertheless we returned to it: there was nowhere else to go. We returned to New York, appropriately—to the homeland of the uprooted, where everyone you met came from another town and tried to forget it; where nobody seemed to have parents, or a past more distant than last night's swell party, or a future beyond the swell party this evening and the disillusioned book he would write tomorrow" (47).

the splintered plank walls, the green waves spume under the round bow as the ferry, skidding on the tide, crashes, gulps the broken water, slides, settles slowly into the slip" (Dos Passos 15). From the start, the urban space amasses debris and operates as the symbolic extension of a community stigmatized, on the one hand, by the moral and spiritual sterility, and, on the other, by the vital frustration of the individuals that live within it. Thus in *Manhattan Transfer*, all citizens are portrayed as sick, for they are all afflicted by the sterility, the frustration, and the moral degeneration that characterizes the entire community; and, consequently, the representation of the city in the novel is defined, from the paradigm advanced by Scott and Simpson-Housely, as depicting "the threat of Babylon" (331). As they argue: "In western letters, then, urban realities are located over against the assumed innocence of an Eden now lost, but somehow promised again in a New Jerusalem,[40] which itself may only be understood in the contrast of a sinful Babylon" (331). The representation of the modern city as a sort of Babylon-like city is essentially *menacing*, and presents "various images of alienation, expressed in a spectrum of suffering ranging from homelessness through gender differences to urban violence, even impending, economic, social and political chaos" (335). Such is undoubtedly the case of *Manhattan Transfer*, as Arrignton explains:

> In the Third Section of John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer*, both the opening and closing chapter titles are direct quotations from two rather obscure Old Testament prophets. 'Rejoicing City That Dwelt Carelessly' comes from Zephaniah (…) [and] the title of the concluding chapter [='The Burthen of Nineveh'] borrows from the opening line of Nahum (…) Jeremiahs both, these prophets sing of the destruction of Judah, Nineveh, and Babylon, cities corrupted by their own wealth and success; and Dos Passos remembers their laments in warning New York, and America of a similar fate. Dos Passos had made this comparison between New York and its biblical counter-parts several years before *Manhattan Transfer* appeared. In a letter to Germaine Lucas-Chamionniere, he admits that New York, for all its magnificence, reminded him of 'Nineveh and Babylon, of the Ur of Chaldees, of the immense cities which loom like basilisks behind the horizon in ancient Jewish tales, where the temples rose as high as mountains and people ran trembling through dirty little alleys to the constant noise of whips with hilts of gold.' (438)

The identification between New York City and Babylon in the chapter titled

[40] See the following chapter, p. 244.

"Rejoicing City that Dwelt Carelessly"[41] is in fact portrayed as catastrophic; the chapter begins with the following epigraph: "In the subway their eyes pop as they spell out APOCALYPSE, typhus, cholera, shrapnel, insurrection, death in fire, death in water, death in hunger, death in mud" (Dos Passos 247). As exposed in this last part of the novel, the moral collapse of the 'new Babylon' is symbolically codified in the text through the rhetoric of sickness, which results in the depiction of Manhattan as a modern Waste Land, that is, a space *mythically* plagued with death (in fire, in water, in hunger, in mud, among the shrapnel) and sickness (typhus, cholera), which are in truth the symbols of the moral and spiritual degeneration that afflicts the urban community.

Such condition of moral collapse, symbolized as all-pervading death and sickness, is thus represented as if it were a pandemic disease; but ultimately, the modern city itself is recreated as somehow the cause of the degenerate community's affliction. Malcolm Bradbury explains: "Manhattan [is] a vast collective motion, a mechanical womb, a machine for living and suppressing life (...) [so] what is displaced from the individual life is reinvested in the operational city itself. Mechanism and destructiveness are dominant, and characters become like the impersonal environment through which they move" (*Novel* 107). The city absorbs its inhabitants' vital energy. It *processes* them, like a grinder crushes food, as eloquently depicted in the epigraph that opens the novel: "Handwiches whirl with jingle of chains. Gates fold upwards, feet step out across the crack, men and women press through the manuresmelling wooden tunnel of the ferry-house, crushed and jostling like apples fed down a chute into a press" (Dos Passos 15). Such is the first image of the city depicted in *Manhattan Transfer*: the city as a machine that grinds and crushes the citizens as soon as they step out of the ferry and set foot on the city streets.[42] It is highly eloquent how such image is immediately followed by the birth of one of the main characters, Ellen Thatcher, for in fact the life aspirations of all the characters portrayed in the novel will be repeatedly crushed, "like sausage meat" (115) in the course of the narrative.

If the city in *Manhattan Transfer* functions as symbolic extension of sick urban mass represented in the novel, the city itself is recreated also as a *sick* space, which

[41] Significantly, the notion of 'carelessness' as a defining trait of the corrupt urban community recurs—and takes major prominence—in the other great 1925 'wasteland' novel about New York City, *The Great Gatsby*, which will analyzed in the depth in the following chapter.

[42] This image will recur later on in the novel, in a key passage during which Jimmy Herf rejects the offer to work in Wall Street for his uncle out of the fear that his vital energy will be processed (and suppressed) by the grinding machine of the city. The character's stream of consciousness reveals such fear: "Jimmy fed in a tape in and out of the revolving doors, noon and night and morning, the revolving doors grinding out his years like sausage meat" (115).

conveys a Freudian truth. As hypothesized by Freud in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1929), "the word 'civilization' described the whole sum of the achievements and the regulations which distinguish our lives from those of our animal ancestors and which serve two purposes—namely to Project men against nature and to adjust their mutual relations" (*Standard Edition* 89). The city is the place that lodges such regulations is thus the spatial correlative of civilization, that is, a place "built up upon a renunciation of instinct (…) [and] presupposes precisely the non-satisfaction of instinct" (97). The result is consequently a "cultural frustration" (97), made manifest in "the psychological poverty of groups" (115). After "the cultural super-ego has developed its ideals and its norms" (142), the collective cultural frustration of the civilized group ineluctably results in a generalized neurosis, insofar as, due to the "unpsychological proceedings of the cultural super-ego" (143), "a person becomes neurotic because he cannot tolerate the amount of frustration which society imposes on him in the service of its cultural ideals" (87).

In *Manhattan Transfer* frustration is the defining trait of all the characters' life experiences in the city. For just as the urban space can be examined as the emblem of the masses' discontent, such collective discontent is epitomized (and can thus be examined) in the vital frustration of the two main characters of the novel, Ellen and Jimmy, who somehow connect as nodal points the many scattered and dissociated lives of the individuals grinded and processed by the city machine into the shapeless 'sausage meat' that is the urban mass. From the moment Ellen is born, and her birth is juxtaposed to the image of a crowd arriving in the city and being "crushed and jostling like apples fed down a chute into a press" (Dos Passos 15), the symbolic map of the novel is eloquently drawn, because in fact, throughout the narrative, the city will operate as a powerful machine that process and ultimately *steals* the life from the citizens, as eloquently argued by Mottram who, in his study of Dos Passos's novel, defined Manhattan as a "machine for living death" (240).[43] Thus in the city, individuals—Ellen perhaps more explicitly than any other character—are trapped in an immutable state of *living death*, sort of like ghosts and living dolls, not altogether different from the crowd

[43] Ellen's birth in the mechanizing, dehumanized and polluted landscape of Manhattan may be symbolically associated with the birth of the lilacs bred by the dead land in the first lines of *The Waste Land*, as it juxtaposes Ellen's new life—described through an image that conveys the notion of natural rebirth from death: "the newborn baby squirmed in the cottownwool feebly like a knot of earthworms" (15)—and the aseptic at best and putrid at worst environment into which she is born. Later in the narrative, Ellen is symbolically identified with a flower, a lily, which, as the lilacs bred in Eliot's poem, is condemned to endure an existence in which sickness and lifelessness are all-pervasive and inescapable.

that floated over London Bridge in Eliot's "unreal city."[44] In fact, Henry Adams's "hysterical" city has degenerated into a *dead* city as it is represented twenty years later in Dos Passos's text, for the allegedly neurotic life of New York City is actually recreated, after the First World War, as a symbolization of a much more serious and much more extended condition. The city in *Manhattan Transfer* indeed gives account of the neurotic discontent of modern civilization, but it also mythologizes the post-war, post-traumatic *zeitgeist* by representing the modern city as counterpart to the mythical Waste Land. And thus the citizens of Manhattan in Dos Passos's novel are in fact counterpart of the living-dead ghosts and corpses that wandered Eliot's Waste Land, for even though they are afflicted by the neurosis of civilization that Freud would diagnose at the end of the decade, they are also trapped in a lifeless, artificial form of existence that emblematizes their overwhelming aversion for life, which constitutes the main symptom of the "universal malady"[45] that afflicts those condemned to languish lifelessly in the post-war Waste Land of the 1920s.

THE BETROTHED

The characters of *Manhattan Transfer* are irreparably bound to live (in) *death*, a state usually represented symbolically in the shape of sterility and profound dissatisfaction. As already mentioned, while such afflictions plight the entire urban mass recreated in Dos Passos's novel, Jimmy and Ellen constitute the most illustrative examples of what it means to live *death*, or rather, to live in the *absence of life*. Hence the life process of Ellen Thatcher narrated in *Manhattan Transfer*—the novel opens with her birth and closes with her death, symbolically speaking—is in fact a process of *dying* rather than an experience of truly living. Because Ellen's vital transformation is actually a process of crystallization, similar to the transformation of a flower that, so it does not whither away, is desiccated instead, and consequently remains in an immutable state of death *in* life. Early in the novel Ellen changes her name to Elaine, as she wishes to become a modern-day Elaine of Astolat. She is explicitly identified with a lily,[46] a flower; but also

[44] See note 107 to this chapter.
[45] See p. 321.
[46] Lilies are meaningfully identified with death in the novel. After the death of Jimmy's mother, he runs away from the cemetery: "He walked on fast splashing through puddles full of sky, trying to shake the droning welloiled words out of his ears, to get the feeling of black crêpe off his fingers, *to forget the smell*

with a myth of romantic dissatisfaction that clearly anticipates the destiny of the character.[47] For, like Elaine of Astolat and Lucy Ashton,[48] Ellen wishes to marry above all else: "Ellen in her new dress of Black Watch plaid mummy'd bought at Hearn's walked down the asphalt path kicking her toes in the air. There was a silver thistle brooch on the shoulder of the new dress of Black Watch plaid mummy'd bought at Hearn's. Elaine of Lammermoor was going to be married. The Betrothed" (59). Ominously, young Ellen's stream of consciousness reveals the character's life aspirations as clearly as it sets her tragic fate, for at the end of the novel, Ellen's desiccation and dehumanization will be complete when she agrees to marry George Baldwin, the future mayor of New York City, and thus effectively becomes 'the betrothed'. Such is the point of no return in Ellen's narrative, which up until that moment had depicted the character's increasing dissatisfaction precisely through a concatenation of frustrating romantic relationship and marriages. For in the end, young Ellen's most ardent wish—to be married—can only be frustrated in the Waste Land, where lifeless and sterile lust has replaced generative love.[49]

As symbolized through Ellen's narrative of repetitive romantic frustration, in the Waste Land of the 1920s, the institution of marriage—which socially arbitrates a fertility rite and also coincides with the regenerative ending of traditional romance[50]—is

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of lilies" (108, my italics). Later in the novel, as it will be further on detailed, it is precisely the artificial smell of Ellen's perfume—that is, "the smell of lilies"—which, as it contrasts with the memory of smelling wild roses in France, will trigger the epiphany that momentary transports Jimmy (and the reader) outside of the Waste Land.

[47] When Ellen asks her friend Alice not to ever call her Ellen again, Alice responds: "Well Elaine then, Elaine the lily maid of Astalot" (58). Alice mispronounces 'Astolat' but the reference is a direct quotation taken from the idyll "Lancelot and Elaine" in Tennyson's already analyzed *Idylls of the King*. In the Arthurian canon, Elaine is an ill-fated character whose tragic destiny is a consequence of the unrequited love she feels for Lancelot. Significantly, Ellen shares with Elaine of Astolat a sort of metaphorical value that establishes both characters as both, illustration and epitome of the ineluctable decline of their respective societies, because, as I have argued elsewhere, Elaine's "ominous self-awareness" (Gualberto 164)—a trait she certainly shares with Ellen, as demonstrated by her two changes of name from Ellen to Elaine to Helena—"both illustrates and anticipates the tragic but ineluctable downfall of Camelot, doomed by its own internal contradictions and—as Elaine—by its conception of itself as an idealized, almost heavenly civilization" (164). In this regard, the direct reference to Tennyson's deeply pessimistic retelling of the collapse of Arthurian society in Dos Passos's text is remarkably eloquent in its foreshadowing of Ellen's tragic fate and of the social connotations of her personal tragedy.

[48] Lucy Asthton is the protagonist of Walter Scott's *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819), which narrates the tragic love story of Lucy and Edgar Ravenswood, an enemy of her family. Gaetano Donizetti later adapted the novel into his 1835 opera *Lucia di Lammermoor*, which helped popularize the ill-fated love of "the bride of Lammermoor."

[49] Arrignton explains: "Ellen's dilemma recalls the twin myths of Tantalus and Sisyphus: myths of desire without consummation, the horrible endlessness of repetition. With Ellen's resignation to the machine she has become, she joins those other synecdoches for the Metropolis: revolving doors, squirrel cages, steamrollers, rollercoasters, nicklelodeons, and fire engines—each figure suggesting a numbing redundancy of endings and beginnings, history as interminable transition" (441).

[50] See chapters 3 (p, 84) and 4 (p. 114).

no longer represented simply as sterile, either physically or spiritually. In *Manhattan Transfer*, the fertility ritual culturally regulated through marriage is presented as deleterious, as it epitomizes the civilized institutionalization of the individual's life instincts, resulting in the masses' neurosis. This notion is visibly illustrated when Ellen, still very young, chooses to marry John Oglethorpe, a homosexual producer of variety shows. Interestingly, in exchange for the inevitable frustration of her barren marriage, Oglethorpe provides Ellen with the possibility of becoming an actress, that is, with the possibility of systematically living a *fake* life. Ellen denies her life impulses and replaces their satisfaction with the possibility of pretending to live a representation of life, and she does so morbidly, at the cost of her own health:

> The rain lashed in her face spitefully stinging her flesh, wetting her nightdress. She pushed her forehead against the frame. Oh I want to die. I want to die. All the coldness of her tight body in her stomach was clenching. Oh I'm going to be sick. She went into the bathroom and closed the door. When she had vomited she felt better. Then she climbed into bed again careful not to touch John. If she touched him she would die (...) With the wind and the rain streaming in the window it was as if the room and the big bed and everything were moving, running forward like an airship over the sea. *Oh it rained forty days*... Through a crack in the cold stiffness the little tune trickled warm as blood... *And it rained forty nights*. (112-3)

This excerpt describes the wedding night of Ellen and Oglethorpe, and it effectively portrays Ellen as counterpart of Elaine of Astolat, insofar as the frustration of her desire creates in her a literal death wish.[51] She becomes aware of her own illness as she rests her forehead on the windowpane and observes the rain, in a moment that foreshadows the final moment in Ellen's narrative when she decides to marry Badlwin: "*Inexorably* his lips closed on to hers. Beyond the shaking glass window of the taxi, *like someone drowning*, she saw out of a corner of an eye whirling faces, streetlights, zooming nickleglinting wheels" (336, my italics). Ellen still sees the world through a window-pane, but now the rain hitting the glass is *drowning* her. 'Death by water' is thus functional in the (Eliot-inspired) symbolization of Ellen's literal and spiritual demise, which immediately follows her decision to marry Baldwin, the man who years before had threatened her with a revolver and told her that "some day some man's going to take a gun and shoot you" (209). The possibility of Ellen's literal death is thus

[51] Cf. with Malory: "I take God to my record I loved never none but Sir Launcelot Du Lake, not ever shall, and a clean maiden I am for him and for all other; and sithen it is the sufferance of God that I shall die for the love of so noble a knight (…) good Lord, I might not withstand the fervent love wherefore I have my death" (II 413).

intuited at the end of the novel, but after water has been consistently represented as a symbol of death throughout the novel—and even more explicitly, taking into account how water operates symbolically in the scenes construed around Ellen's marriages—Ellen's final sensation of drowning certainly seems to signify a non-regenerative spiritual death of the kind that is all-pervasive in Eliot's *The Waste Land*. For even more eloquently, after marrying Oglethorpe, as Ellen looks at the rain outside the window, her neurotic self manages to articulate her anxiety into a song that transform the rain she obverse into an apocalyptic flood: "*Oh it rained forty days / And it rained forty nights / And it did not stop till Christmas / And the only man That survived the flood / Was legged Jack of the Isthmus*" (113). Significantly, the flood recedes in Christmastime, that is, the Christian celebration of the redemptive coming of Christ, which, in cosmological time, coincides with the winter solstice, when the days begin to lengthen in anticipation of the spring. Yet, at that time of renewal, only one man has survived the flood: Longlegged Jack of the Isthmus. In striking contrast with the biblical myth, in which a male and a female specimen of every species survive the flood to ensure the sexual reproduction of all creatures, regeneration is not possible in the story contained in Ellen's song, which, in fact, unhappily foreshadows the events of the novel. At the end of *Manhattan Transfer* only one man will survive the flood: Jimmy, the lone survivor who will leave the Waste Land and will stand upon the isthmus that connects the continent with the concrete island of Manhattan.

DEATH BY FIRE

The evocative juxtaposition of (the supposedly regenerative rite of) marriage and the dreadful occurrence of death by water is not exclusive to Ellen's narrative, even if marriage features more prominently in her story than in any of the other characters'—she is, after all, "the betrothed." Yet one of the most eloquent passages in the text is the vignette that closes the first part of the novel, in which Bud Korpenning—who at fifteen arrived in New York wanting to get to "the center of things" (16)—kills himself by jumping off the Brooklyn Bridge, as his near-delirious consciousness conjures up a fantasy of prosperity and marital bliss not much different from young Ellen's romantic fantasies:

> In a swallowtail suit with a gold watchchain and a red seal sing riding to his weeding beside Maria Sackett, riding in a carriage to the City Hall with four white horses to be made an alderman by the mayor; and the light grows behind them brighter brighter, riding in satins and silks to his wedding, riding in pinkplush in a white carriage with Maria Sackett by this side through rows of men waving cigars, bowing, doffing brown derbies, Alderman Bud riding in a carriage full of diamonds with his milliondollar bride… Bud is sitting on the rail of the bridge. The sun has risen behind Brooklyn. The windows of Manhattan have caught fire. He jerks himself forward, slips, dangles by a hand with the sun in his eyes. The yell strangles in his throat as he drops. (119)

Bud's tragic demise juxtaposes water and fire—the two symbolic nodal points of the novel—so that both symbols are automatically associated to a death that, far from being regenerative,[52] is a testament to the deleterious force of the city upon the life of those who attempt to live in it. Destitute and driven to near madness by paranoia—convinced that a man "in a derby hat with a cigar in his mouth" (117) is following him because he has found out that Bud killed his abusive father before escaping to New York—Bud lives as a "Bowery bum" in Manhattan, wandering the city, rootless, yet trapped: "Every year I says to myself I'll hit the road again, go out and plant myself among the weeds an the grass and the cows coming home milkin time, but I don't; I juss kinder hangs on" (116). He reveals the truth about his youth aspirations and how life in Manhattan has thwarted them: "When I was a kid I kep company with ole man Sackett's girl. Her and me used to keep company in the ole icehouse down in Sackett's woods an we used to talk about how w'd come to New York Cit an git rich and now I'm here and I cant git work an I cant git over bein sceered" (117). At only twenty-five, Bud finds no alternative to suicide, and so the typically naturalistic tone of his story immediately acquires powerful symbolist overtones when Bud, as he "cant git over bein sceered," robs a bridegroom's clothes and loses himself in a fantasy of marriage right before jumping into the river as soon as "the windows of Manhattan have caught fire."

[52] The transformation of water—a universal symbol of "spiritual fertility and the spiritual life" (Becker 322)—into a symbol of non-regenerative death was explained in length in the previous chapter and, as it will be explained in this and later chapters, is a constant in the symbolism of American modernism. In *Manhattan Transfer*, the same transformative process occurs with fire. Fire—also a prominent symbol of barren destruction in *The Waste Land*, most eloquently in the words of the thunder and in giving title to the third canto—is a recurrent force of death in Dos Passos's novel, as it will be demonstrated throughout the chapter. But if traditionally, "its power of destruction is often interpreted as a means to rebirth on a higher level" (Becker 112), in *Manhattan Transfer* death by fire is as deleterious on a spiritual, "higher level" as death by water, because as it will be argued in the chapter, in the Waste Land that is the modern city after the First World War, no kind of death can any longer bring about a full restoration of life, neither literally, nor spiritually.

The symbolic juxtaposition of marriage, death by water, and the image of the city catching fire closes thus the first part of the novel and provides the key to decoding all the symbolism contained in the text. For Bud's fantasy of a sumptuous wedding in Central Park, after the mayor has made him alderman, in fact defines marriage in the civilized life of the modern city as being inextricable from the complete integration—or rather, *disintegration*—of the individual's life instincts and personal aspirations within the communal institutions that arbitrate social, affective and sexual relationships among the urban mass. Bud's fantasies of marrying his old neighbour Maria Sackett take shape in a daydream that connects marriage and the municipal life of the city in a way that uncannily presages Ellen's unfortunate destiny, so that no comfort can be drawn from the happy reverie that is immediately followed by Bud's death by water and juxtaposed by the image of a city on fire.[53]

This image that closes the first part of the novel is echoed in the last two vignettes of the second part, when Ellen aborts Stan's baby.[54] On the ferry, as "a faint riverwind blows the dust and gasoline out of their nostrils" (242) and "the waves slap tinily against the shoving bow of the ferry" (242), Ellen observes the approaching city, where "the square frames of houses along the Drive opposite flicker like burnedout fireworks (242)." Fire and water are juxtaposed as she asks her friend Larry to take her back to Manhattan: "'After all day it's exciting isnt it Larry, getting back into the center of things?" (242). Both Ellen's words and her location mirror Bud's tragic narrative so that, predictably, the scene is immediately followed by Ellen's abortion. The procedure itself is elided, yet signified by the presence of the fire engine as she steps out into the streets of Manhattan. "The roar of the streets breaks like surf about a shell of throbbing agony (…) She raises her hand. 'Taxi!' A fire-engine roars past, a hosewagon with sweatyfaced men pulling on rubbercoats, a clanging hookandladder. All the feeling in her fades with the dizzy fade of the siren" (243).

The fire engine is a symbol recurrently associated with the presence of death or danger in the novel, as it usually (but not only) follows the steps of an arsonist that

[53] This image is more or less literalized at different stages in the novel, as there is an arsonist setting fires around the city who often crosses ways with Jimmy and who is habitually followed by the ever-present fire engine, one of the functional symbols in the text that conveys the imminence of danger and death. As Arrington argues, "Dos Passos sets his fiction of Transition against the prediction of God's imminent destruction of the world. Instead of Jehovah's flames, however, he gives us the frequent arrival and departure of fire engines and so controls the frequency and circumstances of their appearance [so]that the fire engines become associated with death, sickness, or fear of death" (441).

[54] Meaningfully, Stan—a character driven by an overwhelming death-wish—dies in the bathtub. Drunk, he loses consciousness and drops a cigarette, drowning as he sets his house on fire.

appears here and there throughout the novel.[55] As a symbol, the fire engine is more often connected to Jimmy, whereas in Ellen's narrative, artificial flowers are the functional symbol that, as it will be detailed, conveys the character's aversion for life and her progressive degeneration into lifelessness. Yet in the moment of her abortion, the threat of death by fire, incarnated in the presence of the fire engine, penetrates Ellen's story to signify the moment when, by choosing not to have Stan's child, Ellen "embraces sterility as her destiny" (Gelfant 51-2). The destiny of Ellen is thus her resignation to embrace the sterile life in the Waste Land, and thus as the narrative resumes in the third part of the novel, Ellen has already become Helena. She has changed her name once again in a reference to Greek mythology that reinforces the inextricably connection between Ellen's personal destiny and the collective devastation that Ellen's narrative embodies. As Lowry explains, all of Ellen's lovers "are themselves crippled by the moral and emotional enervation they would relieve; unable or unwilling to direct their masculine energies toward fruitful, life-enhancing ends, they are foredoomed to frustration" (57). Consequently, Ellen's successive marriages can only bring about the exacerbation of the barrenness and dissatisfaction that, with both changes of her name, Ellen embraces as her destiny. But as she perceives herself as Helena, Jimmy names her "Elliedoll" (Dos Passos 273), a name than more than any other conveys Ellen's movement towards lifelessness, which itself epitomizes the collective destiny of the urban mass that languishes in the Waste Land of Manhattan.

[55] Arrington summarizes some of the most relevant intrusions of the fire engine along the narrative: "Ed Thatcher's discovery of the burning tenement house initiates this pattern (…) and even before we meet Stan Emery, Dos Passos obliquely ties the fire engine to alcohol and decadence in having the Colonel and Fifi discover her former companion, "the fair young man quietly vomiting into a firebucket under a wrinkled palm" (p. 35). Later, a young Herf bumps into a man whose smell makes Herf suspect that he may be a "firebug" (…) [Ellen] imagines herself sitting "cold white out of reach like a lighthouse. Men's hands crawl like bugs on the unbreakable glass. Men's looks blunder and flutter against it helpless as moths. But in the deep pit blackness inside some-thing clangs like a fire engine" (p. 182). Another fire engine screams in the background as Stan confesses his love for Ellen (p. 216). Still another "roars past" Ellen after she has had Stan's child aborted (p. 268). This pattern continues into Section III. Martin threatens suicide against the alarming background of a siren (p. 362) while for little Martin, Herf's and Ellen's son, the fire engine invokes the dread of an unknown darkness (p. 372) which engulfs Anna Cohen as the fire engines make their last call (p. 399)" (441).

THE ELLIEDOLL

After spending a few years in post-war Europe,[56] married and with a child, Jimmy and Ellen return to Prohibition-era New York in the third section of the novel. As they dine in a speakeasy, Jimmy watches Ellen and a momentary sensory overload triggers an epiphany[57] that, for one single moment in the novel, allows the reader to escape the Waste Land:

> When he stretched his legs out under the table he *touched* her feet. She drew them away. Jimmy could *feel* his jaws chewing, they *clanked* so loud under his cheeks he thought Ellie must hear them. She sat opposite of him in a gray tailoredsuit, her neck curving up heartbreakingly from the ivory V left by the crisp frilled collar of her blouse, her head tilted under tight gray hat, her lips made up; cutting up little pieces of meat and not eating them, not saying a word.
> 'Gosh… let's have another cocktail.' He felt paralyzed like in a nightmare; *she was a porcelain figure under a bellglass*. A current of fresh snowrinsed air from somewhere eddied all of a sudden through the blurred packed jangling glare of the restaurant, cut the *reek* of food and drink and tobacco. For an instant he caught the *smell* of her hair. The cocktails *burned* in him. God I don't want to pass out.
> Sitting in the restaurant of the Gare de Lyon, side by side on the black leather bench. His cheek *brushes* hers when he reaches to put herring, butter, sardines, anchovies, sausage on her plate. They ate in a hurry, globbing, giggling, gulp wine, start at every screech on an engine… (272, my italics)

Jimmy's consciousness transports him in present-time narration to their honeymoon in France, where he and Ellen touched lovingly and ate avidly in striking contrast with the frigidness, lack of appetite and numb inebriation they experience in the

[56] It is highly significant that Jimmy comes to a realization about the deleterious effect that New York City has upon their lives after he returns from Europe, when taking into consideration how Cowley describes the shock experienced by the American expatriates upon their return to New York: "New York, to one returning from Paris or London, seems the least human of all the babylons. Its life is expressed in terms of geometry and mechanics: the height and cubical content of its buildings, the pressure that squeezes them upward like clay squeezed out between the fingers, the suction that empties one district to overcrowd another, the lines of force radiating from subway stations, the density of traffic. Its people have a purely numerical function: they are counted as units that daily pass a given point. Their emotions are coefficients used in calculating the probability of trade" (*Exile* 201).

[57] The term 'epiphany' is used here in its Joycean sense, that is as a moment in which "first we recognize that the object is *one* integral thing, then we recognise that it is an organised composite structure, a *thing* in fact: finally, when the relation of the parts is exquisite, when the parts are adjusted to the special point, we recognise that is *that* thing which it is. Its soul, its whatness, leaps to us from the vestment of its appearance. The soul of the commonest object, the structure of which is so adjusted, seems to us radiant. The object achieves its epiphany. (q. in Mahaffey 178). It is through the progressive sensory perception of Ellen's object-like appearance that Jimmy recognises her as an integral *object*, the soul of which is revealed to him in that instant, so that, at last, his thoughts are able to articulate the dehumanizing horror of the individual's lifelessness in the city; that is to say, the 'whatness' of the object that Ellen has become.

crowded, reeking New York restaurant. Jimmy remembers life outside of the city, but the overwhelming lifelessness of the present interrupts the flashback:

> Side by side in the window in the lurching jiggling corridor. Deedleddump, going south. Gasp of nightingales along the track among the silverdripping poplars. The insane cloudy night of moon light smells of gardens garlic rivers freshdunged field roses. Gasp of nightingales.
> Opposite of him the Elliedoll was speaking. 'He says the lobster salad's all out… Isn't that discouraging?'
> Suddenly he had his tongue. 'Gosh if that were the only thing.'
> 'What do you mean?'
> 'Why did we come back to this rotten town anyway?' (273)

Jimmy understands in this moment that Ellen's lifelessness and his permanent frustration are the consequences of their life in the city. As mentioned, all throughout the novel Ellen's symbolic desiccation is associated with the presence of artificial flowers, a form of still life that stands in as the symbolic opposite of the wild rosesthat Jimmy smells during his epiphany.[58] The epiphany is triggered by the smell of Ellen's hair who is no longer the *lily* maid of Astolat; she has become "a porcelaine figure under a bellglass;" as his consciousness returns to the present moment, Jimmy is made aware of Ellen's crystallization, refers to her as "the Elliedoll" and immediately blames the city for Ellen's lifelessness. The dichotomy between Waste Land (Manhattan) and Eden (anywhere outside Manhattan) is made evident through Jimmy's idealized recollections of his time in Europe, which his hyperaesthetic point of view transforms into a mythic space of peace, fertility and fruitfulness directly taken from an archetypal pastoral tale:

> Before the kid was born Ellie sometimes had toobright eyes like that. The time of the hill when she had suddenly wilted in his arms and been sick, and he had left her among the munching, calmly staring cows on the grassy slope and gone to a shepherd's hut and brought back milk in a wooden ladle, and slowly as the mountains hunched up with evening the color had come back into her cheeks and she had looked at him that way and said with a dry little laugh: It's the little Herf inside me. (290)

Jimmy perceives the spaces outside of Manhattan as a *locus amoenus* where the

[58] As mentioned throughout the chapter, artificial roses—printed on carpets, curtains and clothes—are the most common kind of fake flowers symbolically associated with Ellen. But there are also real roses in Manhattan, specifically, American Beauties, which however function as symbols of sickness and decay, because, as they are their favourite kind of flower, both Jimmy's and Ellen's mothers are often gifted bouquets of cut, *dying* American Beauties as they both lie convalescing in their respective sick beds.

characters can escape the sterility and frustration inherent to their lives in the city. Outside of the Waste Land, Ellen is pregnant; she has rosy cheeks and too-bright eyes. When she feels sick, she is healed immediately with the help of fresh milk brought by a shepherd in a wooden ladle. Clearly, the space of Jimmy's memory is unreal: there are munching cows and green slopes and shepherds' huts. It is a literary trope created by his writer's mind to function as a mythical counterpoint to the urban space, which in turn is then represented as a perverse, rotting mythical space, a Waste Land in which elements like fire and water can only bring about death and devastation, and the only 'living' flowers are 'living dead' flowers embroidered or printed in curtains and carpets, futilely attempting to disguise the true aridity that surrounds and *infects* the characters: "Ellen had just hung a chintz curtain in the window to hide with its blotchy pattern of red and purple flowers the vista of desert backyards and brick flanks of downtown houses" (172). As mentioned, the attempt is futile: Ellen closes the flowered curtains to hide the desolate sight of desert backyards, but in that same vignette she convinces her friend Cassie to have an abortion. Cassie tells Ellen about her unborn child: "I can feel the howor of it cweeping up on me, killing me" (174). In the Waste Land, Ellen replaces the aridity of the landscape with a blotchy pattern of red and purple flowers, and the action is juxtaposed to Cassie's decision to have an abortion, as she feels that the promise of new life is in fact a threat of death, a horror that creeps on her and threatens to kill her. Once again, the passage ominously preludes Ellen's future circumstances:

> Out of a sick mask of fatigue she watches fruitstores, signs, buildings being built, trucks, girls, messengerboys, policemen through the jolting window. If I have my child, Stan's child, it will grow up to jolt up Seventh Avenue under a sky of beaten lead that never snows watching fruitstores, signs, buildings being built, trucks, girls, messengerboys, policemen… She presses her knees together, sits up straight on the edge of the seat with her hands clasped over her slender belly. O God the rotten joke they've played on me, taking Stan away, *burning him up*, leaving me nothing but *this growing in me that's going to kill me*. She's whimpering into her numb hands. O God why wont it snow? (238, my italics)

Ellen does not want to have her child in a city where it never snows, and once again her refusal to bring new life into the Waste Land is articulated into the uncanny premonition that the new life of her child will bring about her own death. Ellen's pregnancy, which could denote a moment of fertility and renewal of life, is thus depicted as a circumstance of death and danger, symbolically inextricable from Stan's death by fire. Hence the narrative establishes a concatenation of symbols that convey

the meaning of Ellen's narrative: the artificial flowers that embellish Ellen's vignettes are inseparable from Ellen's life journey towards a complete rejection of life and a wilful embrace of her doll-like lifelessness,[59] and that final moment of renunciation of a true life that is ineluctably perishable is ultimately connoted by the threatening presence of fire and water as conductors of a non-regenerative death. In every moment, besides, Ellen is fully aware of her own symbolic transformation into a porcelain doll; she acknowledges her frustration and neurosis as the inextricably conditions of her life in Manhattan, and she embraces such collective malady of the urban mass as her destiny.[60] As she agrees to marry Badlwin at the end of the novel—that is, to marry the future mayor and thus to fully integrate herself within the institutions that arbitrate and suppress life in the city—Ellen shows remarkable self-awareness as she recognizes her own *crystallization*:

> Ellen stayed a long time looking in the mirror, dabbing a litte superfluous powder off her face, trying to make up her mind. She winding up a hypothetical dollself and setting it in various positions. Tiny gestures ensued, acted out on various model stages. Suddenly she turned away from the mirror with a shrug of her toowhite shoulders and hurried to the dinningroom. (…) Through dinner she felt a gradual icy coldness stealing through her like novocaine. She had made up her mind. It seemed as if had set the photograph of herself in her own place, forever frozen into a single gesture. An invisible silk band of bitterness was tightening around her throat, strangling. (…) Ellen felt herself sitting with hr ankles crossed, rigid as a porcelain figure under her clothes, everything about her seemed to be growing hard and enameled, the air bluestreaked with cigarettesmoke, was turning to glass. (334-335)

[59] Artificial flowers are associated to Ellen from the beginning of the novel: "stepping carefully among the roses on the sunny field of the carpet, little Ellen danced" (28). The same flowered carpet reappears years later, when Ellen visits her father to let her know she is getting divorced, symbolizing then the frustration of Ellen's first marriage: "Ellen dropped onto the Davenport and let he eyes wander among the faded red roses of the carpet" (183). As mentioned, artificial flowers signify Ellen's aversion for life, as most eloquently expressed during the scene when Baldwin first propositions Ellen: "Laying her gloves away on the edge of the table her hand brushed against the base of rusty red and yellow roses. A shower of faded petals fluttered onto her hand, her gloves, the table. She shook them off with her hands. 'And do have him take these wretched roses away George… I hate faded flowers'" (200).

[60] As she drives to meet Badlwin and accept his marriage proposal, Ellen's stream of consciousness reveals her neurosis, but also her ominous self-awareness: "All her nerves were sharp steel jangled wires cutting into her. 'What does it matter?' she kept asking herself. 'Hell's wait. I'm in no hurry to see him. Let's see, how many blocks?'… Less than twenty, eighteen.' It must have been to keep from going crazy people invented numbers. The multiplication table better than Coué as a cure for jangled nerves. Probably that's what old Peter Stuyvesant thought, or whoever laid the city out in numbers. (…) 'George do you realize that it's only because numbers are so cold and emotionless that we're not all crazy?' (…) 'I must explain it. It's a system. I thought it all up coming up in the taxi… You go in and order anything you like. I'm going to the ladies' room a minute… and please have me a Martini. I'm dead tonight, just dead" (333-334).

When Jimmy asks Ellen, “Look here do you like any more?” (310), she admits: “I guess I don’t love anybody for long unless they’re dead” (310), disclosing her hatred for living flowers as a correlative of her incapacity to love the living. McLuhan explains: “It has often been noted that there is never love between the characters of Dos Passos. But there is the pathos of those made incapable of love by their too successful adjustments to a loveless system” (160). Such is indeed Ellen’s pathology: she has adapted so completely to her life in that city that she has been infected by the malady that characterizes the urban community as a whole. As Gelfant argues, urban space in *Manhattan Transfer* “embodies the trend away from formulated American ideals of a social system that would allow the individual fullest opportunity for equality and personal self-fulfilment as a human being. It symbolizes rather the trend towards a mechanized kind of life that is expressed (...) in the loss of man’s human capacities for love and self-realization” (44-5). The city, as spatial embodiment of social order, exacerbates the deleterious impact of communitarian institutions upon the life and self-realization of individuals. Throughout the novel, Jimmy is repeatedly made aware of that notion, and thus he chooses to flee the city whereas Ellen, by choosing to marry the mayor, symbolically integrates herself completely with the mechanizing, dehumanizing energies of the social institutions that regulate life in the city.

THE CITY OF DESTRUCTION

Jimmy leaves the Waste Land at the end of the novel, boarding the ferry along with a truck “unexpectedly merry, stacked with pots of scarlet and pink geraniums, carnations, alyssum, forced roses, blue lobelia” (Dos Passos 359). Living flowers are transported out of the concrete island where they cannot survive, because life in the Waste Land is either diseased or artificial, a circumstance that Ellen embraces while Jimmy rejects. He admits about himself: “But here I am by Jesus Christ almost thirty years old and very anxious to live” (343), considering that he, like Ellen, has been infected by the neurotic malady of the city:

> Perhaps he’s gone crazy, perhaps this is amnesia, some disease with a long Greek name, perhaps they’ll find him picking dewberries in the Hoboken Tube. He laughs out loud so that the old man who came to open the gates game him a

> sudden sidelong look. Cookoo, bats in the belfry, that's what he's saying to himself. Maybe he's right. By gum if I were a painter, maybe they'll let me paint in the nuthouse. (359)

But Jimmy rejects the possibility after he considers it: "I may be crazy, but I don't think so" (359), he realizes, as he notices the wagon loaded with flowers. Jimmy distinguishes himself from the rest of the urban mass as the narrative identifies him with the living flowers that must abandon the Waste Land in order to survive. Thus his narrative concludes with a final act of resistance to the mechanizing and dehumanizing forces of the city that establishes a continuum of meaning in Jimmy's vital resilience. When Jimmy was very young, in a character defining moment, he rejected the possibility of working with his uncle in Wall Street, which would have warranted him social and financial success but would also have determined, as young Jimmy recognized, the complete disintegration of his individuality through the repression of his life instincts. Jimmy notices the crowd that swarms in the office building as an undistinguishable mass of "softcheeked girls chewing gum, hatchetfaced girls with bangs, creamfaced boys his own age, young toughs with their hats on one side, sweatyfaced messengers, criss-cross glances, sauntering hips, red jowls masticating cigars, sallow bodies of elderly men" (115). The disintegration of the crowd is progressive but unstoppable, as individuals dilute in the uniformed mass of stereotyped groups first and ultimately disintegrate in a mass of dissociated body parts. Gelfant explains: "as [the characters] move through the city they perceived people and objects as dissociated images—that is, they do not receive unified and total impressions of entities but only fragmentary impressions of parts of the whole" (47). Sam See concurs: "in point of fact, throughout the text, groups of characters are typically mentioned as a homogonous mass […] or as impersonal synecdoches (…). The text's narrative voice (which varies wildly, including third limited, second person, and free indirect discourse) compounds this homogeny via, paradoxically, heterogeneity, for no single narrative voice claims authority" (351). The result is that the narrative discourse imitates the process by means of which the city annihilates individuality. The city is thus portrayed as a "City of Destruction" (Vanderwerken 256), inhabited by an "atomistic society" (254). Only Jimmy can retake his own individual self when he escapes the city and, "[as] the only passenger on the ferry, he roams round as if he owned it" (Dos Passos 359).

As mentioned, Jimmy abandons the Waste Land next to a wagon loaded with

flowers, and "a rich smell of maytime earth comes from it, of wet flowerpots and greenhouses" (359). As the character escapes, he recovers his will to live, and thus both Jimmy and the "maytime earth" are established as the symbolic correlative of springtime, or rather, of the possibility of life renewal in the Waste Land. Jimmy leaves Manhattan in May after the experiences a major life crisis in April:

> With every deep breath Herf breathed in rumble and grind and painted phrases until he began to swell, felt himself stumbling big and vague, staggering like a pillar of smoke above the April streets (…) Inside he fizzled like sodawater into sweet April syrups, strawberry, sarsaparilla, chocolate, cherry, vanilla dripping foam through the mild gasolineblue air. He dropped sickeningly fortyfour stories, crashed. And suppose I bought a gun and killed Ellie, would I meet the demands of April sitting in the deathhouse writing a poem about my mother to be published in the *Evening Graphic*?
> He shrank until he was of the smallness of dust, picking his way over crags and boulders in the roaring gutter, climbing straws, skirting motoroil lakes. (326-317)

In the city, as in *The Waste Land*, the demands of April entail the overwhelming triumph of death over life, which for Jimmy is made manifest in the thought of either killing himself or murdering Ellen so that their story can have a proper, *fake*, novel-like (and news-like) ending.[61] The demands of April are *cruel* and require death. In the Waste Land, spring is always cruel: "Spring puckering our mouths, spring giving us gooseflesh grows gigantic out of the droning of sirens, crashes with enormous scaring din through the halted traffic, between attentive frozen tiptoe blocks" (332). The reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth carried out in the novel is thus not simply pessimistic, but somehow explicitly apocalyptic. The social structures contained in the urban space, which as explained arbitrate social relationships in the modern, civilized city, no longer assume the existence of a ruling individual such as the King, in whom all relationships between individuals and social groups have their origin and justification. The uniformed urban mass denies the possibility of a king—divine or not—that may redeem the community. The disease of the land has thus no known etiology or cure; if anything, the disease of the land may be argued to be the consequence of the disease of all the citizens, insofar as all citizens can be mythically identified with the sick king of mythology, for they all subject their individuality to the constitution of a uniformed and

[61] When Ellen was at the hospital at Neuilly, giving birth to their child, Jimmy had fantasized about her death: "Suppose she had died; I thought she would. The past would have been completed all round, framed, worn round your neck like a cameo, set up in type, molded on plates for the Magazine Section, like the first of James Herf's article on The Bootlegging Ring" (291).

emblematic entity: the *sick* urban mass. There are no private citizens in the city, paradoxically enough. But the collective disease of the masses is not the consequence of an external cause; there is no mystical wound or curse that has fallen upon the king or the 'wastelanders'. The modern city is *inherently* a space of disease and sterility. There is no possible cure, as there is no possible mysticism that may transform physical death into spiritual regeneration. As Oswald Spengler stated, "all art, all religion and science, become slowly intellectualized, alien to the land, incomprehensible to the peasant of the soil. With the Civilization sets in the climacteric. The immemorially old roots of Being are dried up in the stone-mass of its cities" (92).

Oswald Spengler's influential *The Decline of the West* was translated into English in 1922, the year of the publication of *The Waste Land*. About the modern city, Spengler argued:

> It is the Late city that first defies the land, contradicts Nature in the lines of its silhouette, *denies* all Nature. (...) *Extra muros*, chaussées and woods and pastures become a part, mountains become tourists' view-points; and *intra muros* arises an imitation Nature, fountains in lieu of springs, flower-beds, formal pools, and clipped hedges in lieu of meadows and ponds and bushes. (94)

Manhttan Transfer recreates an "imitation Nature" in which paintings of flowers replace natural flowers, representing the life of the urban masses as a *still life*. As Spengler notes, "the stone Colossus 'Cosmopolis' stands at *the end of the life's course* of every great Culture" (99, my italics), and as such it is represented in *Manhattan Trasfer* through the reinterpretation of a myth of eternally recurrent restoration as an apocalyptic myth of degeneration. This subversive reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth is symbolically executed through the transmutation of the conventional meaning attributed to symbols such as water, fire and flowers, and results in the fatal and irrevocable end of the life's course of nature, traditionally articulated through the regenerative myth recreated—and subverted—in Dos Passos's novel. For in *Manhattan Transfer*, spring itself—embodied in the living flowers and the maytime earth that accompany Jimmy in his flight from the rotting city—must escape the Waste Land so that the new life it brings along is not immediately petrified into the city's 'imitation Nature.' But the ominous representation of New York City as the modernist counterpart to the mythical Waste Land no longer recreates a particular community whose social relationships and power structures are not in perfect equilibrium with the preternatural

cosmology assumed by mythopoeia. On the contrary, the representation of New York City as a mythical Waste Land recreates the paradigm of contemporary civilization—the cultural life of the modern metropolis—as a kind of society that denies, petrifies, artificially recreates and ultimately annihilates the natural world that is transcendent in mythology.

For Spengler, "the rise of New York to the position of world-city during the Civil War of 1861-5 may perhaps prove to have been the most pregnant event of the nineteenth century" (99), the consequences of which were of course extremely calamitous:

> ...when Being is sufficiently uprooted and Waking-Being sufficiently strained, there suddenly emerges into the bright light of history a phenomenon that has long been preparing itself underground and now steps forward to make an end of the drama—the *sterility of civilized man*. This (...) is to be understood as an essentially *metaphysical* turn towards death. The last man of the world-city no longer *wants* to live—he may cling to life as an individual, but as a type, as an aggregate, no, for it is a characteristic of this collective existence that it eliminates the terror of death.

Once the individual dissolves into the mass, they lose their will to live and are instead irrepressibly driven towards lifelessness. Such is evidently the case of Ellen, a clear instance of "the sterility of civilized man." Only as a resilient individual can the civilized man cling to life and thus be free of the "metaphysical turn towards death" that defines contemporary culture. That is why, perhaps, Jimmy must leave the city in isolation, as "Longlegged Jack of the Isthmus," the sole survivor of the Deluge: "he walks on, taking pleasure in breathing, in the beat of his blood, in the tread of his feet on the pavement" (Dos Passos 360).

As Gergely argues, and as it has been explored throughout this chapter, the characters of Dos Passos's novel are "frequently observed to undergo a kind of 'dehumanization': they are 'petrified,' become isolated aesthetic objects themselves, endowed only with a pseudo-solitude which has no intersubjective reference, since the relations constituting subjectivity and alterity are intrinsically deficient in the characters inhabiting this space" (81). The result of such 'aesthetization' is the "vacuity" of the city as a common space that excludes moral life (Gergely 84), in which, as seen, the only character capable of escaping is Jimmy. Yet as Gergely explains, "leaving this common space, nonetheless, however vacuous it may be, also entails the withdrawal

from society, the only (though deficiently) common sphere as such, thereby precluding the emergence of a morally founded, non-vacuous community" (85). That is to say:

> [Jimmy] manages to release himself (or to be released) from the aestheticized world of he city, thereby committing an ethical act (…) Nonetheless, even though Jimmy's move is an act of considerable ethical significance, it cannot lead to the establishment of a non-vacuous moral sphere as it entails the ultimate abandonment of human bonds, thus retaining a central aspect of the vacuity of Manhattan as a common space. (Gergely 88)

Jimmy is no Grail Knight. None of his actions are aimed to restore the Waste Land, nor can he do that by escaping the city. And yet, as Granville Hicks explains, "his ultimate departure is made to seem as hazardous and portentous as the escape from an enchanted castle in a fairy story" (20). From a myth-critical perspective, Hick's analogy is certainly not random, because the city in Dos Passos's novel is not a realistic recreation of New York at the beginning of the twentieth century. In fact, the urban landscapes of modernism stray from naturalistic conventions— "*Manhattan Transfer* is no more 'naturalistic' than *The Waste Land*" (60), Lowry argued—and operate as "metaphor rather than place" (Bradbury "Cities" 97). Thus Manhattan functions in the novel as the symbol of a particular way of life: a mechanized, dehumanized way of life that brings about a generalized state of alienation and physical and spiritual sterility for the civilized man. The city is then configured as a mythical space the boundaries of which widely transcend the historical and geographical limitations of New York City in the first decades of the twentieth century. As Gelfan notes, "the abstract qualities that are presented as urban scenes, characters, atmosphere, social patterns, and historical tendencies are implicit commentaries upon the moral significance of modern American city life" (45). In his commentary on the novel, Alfred Kazin went even further as he claimed that "the book was like a perverse esthetic geometry in which all the colors of the city's scenes were daubed together madly, and all its framed jumbled. What one saw in *Manhattan Transfer* was not the broad city pattern at all, but a wistful absorption in monstrousness" (350).

Manhattan in Dos Passos's novel can be interpreted as a *monstrous* mythical space. The mythical Waste Land is no longer the natural, yet cursed soil where the spring rebirth brings about a social and spiritual communal restoration. On the contrary, the *urban* Waste Land is recreated as an overwhelmingly apocalyptic landscape: "In the subway their eyes pop as they spell out APOCALYPSE, typhus, cholera, shrapnel,

insurrection, death in fire, death in water, death in hunger, death in mud" (Dos Passos 247). The novel is *plagued* with death, *infested* with killings by fire and water which most acutely give account of the impossibility of regeneration. Baldwin speaks to Ellen of "fire that purifies" (131), but when Ellen's lover Stan burns to death no purification comes out of his death. Instead, Ellen chooses to abort Stan's child and thus, as explained, embrace sterility and lifelessness as her destiny, "like someone drowning" (336).

After Eliot's fundamental reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth in *The Waste Land*, fire, water and flowers become inextricable from the modernist representation of the Arthurian myth. In Dos Passos's 'wasteland' novel,[62] these symbols do not signify a cyclical transition from life to death, and back to life again; contrarily, flowers, water and fire are symbols that *juxtapose* life and death and thus signify the generalized state of *death in life* that defines the characters' diseased and spiritually-barren existence. This lifeless existence though is a consequence of the social order arbitrated by the cultural institutions that regulate city life, but also of the specific historical context in which the text generates and of which it gives account. Thus Manhattan actually operates as a symbol that embodies the concerns and anxieties of the 1920s *zeitgeist*; that is, as a symbol that connotes and articulates the concerns and anxieties of a context determined by the political, philosophical, moral, spiritual and ideological collapse brought about the horrors of the First World War. This symbolization of the post-war *zeitgeist* in an image of the barren, mechanized, dehumanizing and rotten megalopolis thus justifies, explains and in fact characterizes the process of mythical reinterpretation in the novel, by means of which *Manhattan Transfer* not simply represents the pre-modern myth of the Waste Land as a correlative to the chaos and degeneration of contemporary society, but actually reinterprets the originally-regenerative myth as a myth of *apocalypse*, by symbolizing the modern megalopolis as counterpart of the mythical Waste Land. For only as a myth of *apocalypse* can the myth of the Waste Land represent and articulate the irreparable horrors of the First World War and the degenerative and incurable condition of those condemned to live—*in death*—in such wasted, war-wrecked land.

[62] The generic term "'wasteland' novel" is my own adaptation of Warren French's term "Wasteland writers," a classificatory denomination he uses to designate authors such as Eliot, Dos Passos, Fitzgerald and Hemingway—whose work is analyzed in the third part of this thesis—because of how their post-war writing conveyed "the pervasive mentality of the Waste Land years of the 1920's" (170). See p. 294.

CHAPTER 9

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD'S *THE GREAT GATSBY*: THE AMERICAN ANTI-ROMANCE

AN INCORRUPTIBLE DREAM

Francis Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) narrates the unfortunate vicissitudes of a group of idle and exaggeratedly rich characters who, in 1922, hop from party to party between Manhattan and Long Island. They occupy the epicentre of the so-called "rotten twenties" or "jazz age:"[63] the New York post-war society that, in spite of its superficial splendour, was corrupted in its core. For the ostentatious wealth enjoyed by (some of) the characters is in fact exposed throughout the novel as the result of an unreal, unproductive, speculative economy that operates as the correlative of the empty, meaningless way of life of a group of people who, to quote Fitzgerald's famous words from his debut novel *This Side of Paradise* (1920), belong to "a new generation dedicated more than the last to the fear of poverty and the worship of success; grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken" (213). In *The Great Gatsby*, the representation of this generation that has replaced their dead God with money takes the form of the tragic life journey of the novel's protagonist, Jay Gatsby, which brings about a deeply pessimistic reinterpretation of the traditional mode of romance. Retrospectively, this reinterpretation might be interpreted as articulating a

[63] Fitzgerald himself coined the term in his collection of short stories, *Tales of the Jazz Age* (1922).

reflection upon the ineluctable degeneration of the "American dream," that is, the communitarian ideal par excellence in the United States. For after the First World War, as Steinbrink explains:

> The conventional wisdom of the nineteenth century, threadbare even before the Great War, was simply and undeniably inadequate to deal with the world which the War had left in its wake. To a person standing at the threshold of the 1920s the pre-war world and its traditions appeared not simply remote, but archaic, the repository of an innocence long since dead. (…) The roar of the twenties was both a birth-cry and a death-rattle, for if it announced the arrival of the first generation of modern Americans it also declared an end to the Jeffersonian dream of simple agrarian virtue as the standard of national conduct and the epitome of national aspiration. (157)

In the opinion of Nick Carraway, the homodiegetic narrator of the novel, Jay Gatsby's life goal is the pursuit of an ideal and transcendent illusion that Nick describes as an "incorruptible dream" (*Gatsby* 126). Such an "incorruptible dream" is in fact identifiable with Gatsby's "platonic conception of himself" (80), that is to say, an idealised and thus unreal notion of himself, from which Gatsby designs his life and justifies his existence as *Gatsby*. In Nick's perception, Gatsby's platonic self-conception is capable in itself of overcoming and transcending the moral and spiritual decadence of reality, a notion which, if subsequently extrapolated to formulate a social discourse, seemingly allows for the argument that Gatsby's "incorruptible dream" of himself actually functions as the narrative duplicate of the "American dream;" that is, the supposedly incorruptible collective ideal that should overcome and transcend the corruption and degeneration of reality. For that reason critics have often declared that, in Fitzgerald's novel, Gatsby "becomes a symbol of America itself" (Troy 21). Lionel Trilling affirmed: "Gatsby, divided between power and dream, comes inevitably to stand for America itself (...) [because] it is Fitzgerald's intention that our mind should turn to the thought of the nation that has sprung from its 'Platonic conception' of itself" (17).

But if, through the understanding of Gatsby's dream as its correlative, the platonic conception of American may be represented—from Nick's blatantly biased perspective—as incorruptible, it is also, at the very least, fatal, because Gatsby's idealised aspirations are in fact destroyed by "[the] foul dust [that] floated in the wake of his dreams" (*Gatsby* 2). From a myth-critical perspective, this chapter aims to explore precisely that "foul dust;" that is to say, this study will analyze the symbolic,

narrative and mythical mechanisms exploited in the novel so as to represent the futility and spiritual barrenness that pervades the apparently glamorous lives of the characters. For they are in truth the emblem of the *degenerate* American social ideal insofar as they represent a human condition that has irredeemably fallen into a perpetual state of decadence and corruption. The representation of such a degenerate society is brought about precisely through the once again subversive reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth which, as demonstrated in the chapters of the third part of this study, is crucial for a myth-critical approximation to American modernism.

The representation of the Waste Land myth in *The Great Gatbsy* is once again pessimistic to the point of being debatably apocalyptic, and it is carried out by the assemblage of all meaningful elements in the text around a central notion: the failure of the later-denominated American dream as a redeeming communitarian ideal. Thus, once again, what was in origin a myth of communal regeneration—which explains and legitimizes a particular social order—is reinterpreted to articulate a reflection upon the ineluctable degeneration of a community whose ideal of integration and common good has disintegrated. Yet, in order to interpret the re-signifying process that brings about a transformation of the Waste Land myth, it is necessary to explain how the communitarian ideal is formulated ideologically in origin, and how it operates in the American tradition. Connsequently, this chapter will expose the parallelism that dichotomises pre-modern mythical structures and contemporary idealised, yet empty social discourses, so as to articulate the process of mythical reinterpretation explored in this study.

THE LAND OF MILK AND HONEY

The term ‘American dream’ was coined some years after the publication of the *The Great Gatsby*, when James Truslow Adams defined it in his book *The Epic of America* as “that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement” (374). Significantly, Adams defined the American dream as “that dream of a land,” which demonstrates that the perception of this social ideal in the decade of 1930 in fact continued the America’s “platonic conception of itself”—so to speak—as a sort of Promised Land or Eden,

which was a foundational notion in the early days of the country. In fact, 'founding father' Benjamin Franklin argued, already in 1782, that the reason for the uncommon growth of population in America was to be found in "the salubrity of air, the healthiness of the climate, the plenty of good provisions, and the encouragement to early marriage by the certainty of subsistence in cultivating the earth" (530). Eloquently, insofar as Benjamin Franklin described the United States as a land of plenty where the fecundity of the population is almost sympathetically connected to the overabundant fertility of the land, it makes sense that the decline of the mythical idea of America as a newfound Eden should be mythically articulated by means of a subversive reinterpretation of the Arthurian tale of the Waste Land, which had been ingrained in the literature of the 1920s after the publication and immediate influence of Eliot's *The Waste Land*. For indeed, originally, the paradisal garden that was plentiful America functioned ideologically as the western frontier of Europe and as such it was mythologized as an Eden-like land of plenty where, as expressed by Adams, a man who toils the land, always rich and fruitful, is guaranteed a prosperous and wealthy life dependent only on his "ability or achievement." For the Puritan settlers, America was "a new Canaan, a veritable land of milk and honey" (Machor 49), religiously conceived as the modern correlative to the biblical Promised Land, a true New Jerusalem that for the first Puritan settlers of the seventeenth century meant "a spiritual state of individual regeneration, a holy congregation of visible saints, and a social construct attuned to the prophetic promise" (Machor 47).[64] Additionlaly, Machor explains:

> The Puritan quest for the New Jerusalem thus became a reenactment of an archetypal journey pattern: a movement away from corruption, through the wilderness and its attendant hardships, toward social and spiritual redemption. But as the Puritans saw it, the errand, read typologically, was to be the final mission of God's elect to build the foundation of the ideal city which had eluded humankind for so long. (49-50)[65]

[64] The city of New Jerusalem is prophesized in the Book of Ezekiel—"In the visions of God brought he me into the land of Israel, and set me upon a very high mountain, by which was as the frame of a city on the south" (*KJB*, Ezek. 40.2); and it is later revealed in the Book of Revelation: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (KJB, Rev. 21.1-4).

[65] As it was explained in the previous chapter, in western literature urban realities are understood either as a manifestation of the lost-and-recovered innocence of Eden in the New Jerusalem, or as a manifestation

As it can be easily observed, the archetypal journey pattern described by Machor—from corruption, through the wilderness, towards regeneration—is the archetypal journey of romance, in general, and of the Grail quest in particular. As such it is featured and reversed in *The Great Gatsby*; but also as such it recurs in the successive process of mythologizing of America that takes place after the founding of the United States as an independent country. For indeed, the following step in the development of a mythical conception of America—always prefigured as an Eden-like western[66] frontier—takes place when the need to occupy new territories arises in the colonies, so that the mythically-conceived land of New England is progressively displaced farther into the west. Thus the ideal notion of a western Eden—represented up until then by the New World for Europeans—is transformed into a historical reality for the new citizens of the United States, as they occupy the fertile and temperate lands west of the Mississippi River and effectively give shape to the mythical ideal of America, which is subsequently emblematized in the figure of the pioneer.[67] The pioneer is conceived in the American collective imagination as a mythical hero, an archetypal figure who marches through the wilderness to establish a new society, profitable and democratic, and founded upon his individual and communitarian values.[68] Consequently, the pioneering journey west is established as the prototypical mythical quest in the American imagination, as it leads those brave enough to venture

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of the threat of the corrupt and degenerate Babylon (see p. 220). As it can be easily intuited after reading the critical exploration of Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer*, the urban reality of New York City in *The Great Gatsby* is represented as a manifestation of the threat of Babylon, which emphasizes acutely the degeneration of America's platonic conception of itself as a place where, as it was once believed, "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (KJB, Rev. 21.4).

[66] See p. 247 and ff. in this chapter.

[67] In his *Penguin History of the USA*, Historian Hugh Brogan introduces the chapter about the economic development of the United States, which was accelerated by the conquest of the western territories, with an English song sung by a child who, from the cigar-factory in London where he worked, dreamed of moving to America. The lyrics of the song are the following: "To the west, to the west, to the land of the free / Where mighty Missouri rolls down to the sea; / Where a man is a man if he's willing to toil, / And the humblest may gather the fruit of the soil. / Where children are blessings and he who hath most / Has aid for his fortune and riches to boast. / Where the young may exult and the aged be at rest / Away, far away, to the land of the west" (qt. Brogan 377).

[68] The configuration in the American cultural tradition of the pioneer or frontier hero as a mythical figure will be further on discussed in chapter 14 (see p. 370), as a mythical exploration of this cultural figure through his archetypal similarities with the Grail knight of Arthurian legend is arguably more relevant for a myth-critical interpretation of McMurphy in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* than it is for a study of Jay Gatsby, since McMurphy is more of a *literal* frontier hero than Fitzgerald's Knight-figure. Yet, some considerations about the archetypal journey west of the pioneers in the American cultural tradition will be included throughout this chapter, as they are useful to understand how Fitzgerald's text reverses the romance archetype through the characters' journey *east*.

through the wilderness into a land of plenty that is collectively perceived as an earthly paradise that guarantees the prosperity of the individual and the community as a whole. This is due to the fact that "the *planting* of the West" (Brogan 219, my italics) was fundamental for the economic development of the United States, as it closed the cycle of capital and resources of the productive economy in the country. In the second half of the nineteenth-century, the mining and agricultural exploitation of natural resources in the West allowed for the industrial specialization of the East, which through trade with the western territories—made easy and fluent by the railroad binding the North-East to the North-West—managed to increase the flow of capital with its reactivation of this cycle.[69] This capitalist production system certainly brought about the economic prosperity of the United States; yet, as represented in *The Great Gatsby*, this form of capitalism was hypertrophied to the point of complete extenuation in the decade of 1920. The production of goods had been replaced by stock-market speculation, a circumstance that would ineluctably lead the new, unproductive economy to the historical crack of 1929. The crack is not entirely—or rather, not explicitly—prophesized in *The Great Gatsby*, but the barren, *hollow* economy of the 1920s is represented in the novel precisely through the reinterpretation of the pre-modern myth of the Waste Land, which articulates the generalized grim sensation that Steinbrink describes as follows:

> [T]he perennial fruits of the American experience were frustration and disappointment. The New Jerusalem envisioned by our Puritan fathers was never to be realized; the possibilities of spiritual regeneration in a boundless New World were fatally diminished by the closing of the frontier; the dream that technology would provide the means to happiness and fulfilment proved a nightmare as the machine threatened to become man's master rather than his servant. (158)

THE REVERSED QUEST

The foundations of the Arthurian myth of the Waste Land are subverted in *The Great Gatsby* by means of two fundamental strategies. First, all the characters in the novel are portrayed as embarking on a journey *east*, that is, towards a destination that is defined by the physical and spiritual sterility of its soil and its population; thus, the novel

[69] For a deeper understanding of this process of economic development, see Brogan's Chapter 17: 'The Billion-Dollar Country 1865-1900' in his *Penguin History of the USA* (pp. 377-406).

straightforwardly reverses the archetype of the mythical journey towards the plentiful plains of the American West to narrate a quest towards the Waste Land. Simultaneously, Fitzgerald's text concatenates a string of symbols, all of them bound to the "ideogram" of the 'valley of ashes' (Trilling 18), which in fact represents the myth of the Waste Land so as to explicitly convey the notion that the new 'mythical' journey of the contemporary 'pioneers' does not lead towards a mythical land of plenty (the Eden recovered of archetypal romance) but towards a wasted, barren land: a literal valley of ashes, "where ashes grow like wheat" (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 18). The new heroic journey is thus futile, and, combined with the many symbols of sterility and corruption represented in the text, it functions as "something like Mr. Eliot's 'objective correlative' for the intermingled feeling of personal insufficiency and disillusionment with the world" (Troy 21).

Of these two narrative mechanisms described as functional in the process of mythical representation and reinterpretation carried out in *The Great Gatsby*, the reversed journey pattern will be analyzed first, as in fact the novel begins with Nick Carraway explaining that he has embarked on his reversed heroic quest because the mythical west has degenerated into "the ragged edge of the universe" (Fitzgerald; *Gatsby* 2). He decides to travel east, then, and settles in the peninsula of the *West* Egg in Long Island—"the less fashionable of the two [Eggs]" (4). The connection between this mock heroic journey and the mythical archetype it reverses is made explicit from the beginning, as Nick perceives himself as "a guide, a pathfinder, an original settler" (3). Yet at the end of the novel, Nick inverts his own reversed mythical journey, even as he knows that there is no hope for redemption in his defeated return to "the bored, sprawling, swollen towns beyond the Ohio" (145). Initially, the mythical journey west is reversed and thus almost ridiculed as Nick's—and the other characters'[70]—journey to the *West* Egg in the decadent, spiritually barren East. At the end of the novel however, the paradigm of the journey west is recovered, but only to be represented as a pathetic, defeated and careless *return* journey that gives account of the failure and cowardice of every character—except, of course, Gatsby, who never travels back west.

Jay Gatsby both embodies and subverts the mythical figure of the frontier hero. He is a self-made man, as Nick's well-known appreciation of him lets the reader know:

[70] "I see now that this has been a story of the West, after all—Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were all Westerners, and perhaps we possessed some deficiency in common which made us subtly unadaptable to Eastern life" (145)

"Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his platonic conception of himself (…) he invented just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen-year-old boy would be likely to invent, and to this conception he was faithful to the end" (80). Yet Gatsby's self-conception (and 'self-making', so to speak), far from realizing the communitarian and individual ideals that could originate a new, regenerated society—as it was implicit in the mythical conception of the West—in fact gives account of the moral emptiness and spiritual barrenness that is inherent to the perverse mythologization of the East as the new paradisiac destination of the pioneer's misguided journey. For the no-return journey of the self-made Gatsby is ineluctably determined by his commitment to the platonic conception of himself that defines and sets the boundaries of his existence, because as Decker eloquently notes, "the national climate that guarantees Gatsby's failure as the traditional selfmade man also provides the social conditions under which his pristine dream can be imagined" (64).

James Gatz wants to be the *great* Jay Gatsby, the millionaire socialite that organizes extravagant parties in Long Island, because he longs to escape his dull farmer's life in the Midwest. However, that social aspiration of upward mobility is only the specific form taken—in the context of Gatsby's role within the community—of his individual aspiration, which, from Nick's perspective, is perceived as incorruptible and thus capable of isolating Gatsby from the all-pervading corruption of the community. But, evidently, such notion corresponds solely to Nick's perception. Gatsby, in fact, models his social aspirations—that is, the social repercussions of his individual platonic aspiration—against the model of Dan Cody, a man he knew in his youth and who explicitly represents the contemporary degeneration of the prototypical pioneer.[71] Cody is described as "a product of the Nevada silver fields" (80); but as Gatsby obsersves his portrait, he reflects that Cody embodies "the pioneer debauchee, who during one phase of American life brought back to the Eastern seaboat the savage violence of the frontier brothel and saloon" (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 81). Gatsby's model is thus explicitly identified as a libertine, a wild "pioneer debauchee," responsible of bringing *back* to the *East* the violence of the West. The West is consequently represented as degenerate, and, more terribly, as a corrupting influence on the East. The ideal of a regenerative, newly-

[71] Nick narrates: "James Gatz—that was really, or at least legally, his name. He had changed it at the age of seventeen and at the specific moment that witnessed the beginning of his career—when he saw Dan Cody's yacht drop anchor over the most insidious flat on Lake Superior. It was James Gatz who had been loading along the beach that afternoon in a torn green jersey and a pair of canvas pants, but it was already Jay Gatsby who borrowed a rowboat, pulled out to the *Tuolomee*, and informed Cody that a wind might catch him and break him in half an hour" (Fitzgerald 79).

recovered Eden found in the West has been drastically transformed; corruption plagues the entire land, and the characters are portrayed as traveling east seeking "the consoling proximity of millionaires" (4), but finding only a sterile and perverse, grotesque and yet conventional landscapes described by Nick "as a night scene by El Greco" (145). Personal aspirations are materialized then into a journey east that proves to be entirely futile, to the point that Long Island, as the eastern destination of the characters' frustrated pilgrimage, becomes a place that in fact destroys the personal desires that had originally motivated the characters' journey.[72] Such is one of the foundations of the process of mythical reinterpretation that takes place in *The Great Gatsby*, as the mythical conception of the West can only be shown as degenerate once it is displaced into the old, *wasted* East, which is recreated as having dissolved to ashes.

The dichotomy that opposes West and East as spaces of plenty and barrenness, respectively, goes back in western culture to, at least, biblical mythology, as already explained in the study of biblical analogies in Shakespeare's *Richard II*.[73] This dichotomy is functional in *The Great Gatsby* as well, and yet it is also subverted, because the West is characterized in the novel as either a place of wilderness or a place of boredom. Yet the sterility of the East is acutely emphasized in the governing symbol—or ideogram, as mentioned—of the 'Valley of Ashes', a literal waste land that functions as correlative of the degeneration and spiritual barrenness that defines the community portrayed in the novel, their lifestyle and the conditions of their environment.

ASH HEAPS AND EASY MONEY

As Nick imagines, for the first settlers of New York, Long Island must have been "the old island here that flowered (...) a fresh green breast of the new world" (*Gatsby* 148). But Nick, a 'pioneer in reverse,' only finds at the end of his journey "a certain desolate area of land (...), a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat" (18). The once exuberantly fertile land of plenty—as conveyed by the use of words such "flowered"

[72] "The lure of the East represents a profound displacement of the American Dream, turning back upon itself of the historic pilgrimage towards the frontier which had, in fact, created and sustained the dream" (Ornstein 57).
[73] See p. 66.

and "breast"—has become a literal *dead* land. As Tony Tanner eloquently argued, in Fitzgerald's novel, "the green breast of the new world has given way, as an image, to the shocking spectacle of Myrtle left breast 'swinging loose like a flap' after the road accident" (196).[74] This terrible transmutation of symbolic images expressively brings about a representation of America as a place "desecrated, mutilated, violated (…) [since] of what might've been a Wonderland (a theme endemic to American literature suggests) we have made a wasteland" (Tanner 196). The valley of ashes that the characters must drive through every time they travel between Manhattan and Long Island—where Myrtle is killed and the tragedy unfolds—functions thus as the most eloquent textual representation of the mythical Waste Land that contemporary New York—and by extension, contemporary America—is represented as:

> This is a valley of ashes—a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of ash-grey men, who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air. Occasionally a line of grey cars crawls along an invisible track, gives out a ghastly creak, and comes to rest, and immediately the ash-grey men swarm up[75] with leaden spades and stir up an impenetrable cloud, which screens their obscure operations from your sight. (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 18)

According to Tanner, this valley of ashes symbolizes "the very reverse of what Emerson and his friends had hoped for America, with the land actually producing, *growing*, ashes (...) the great agrarian continent turning itself into some sort of terminal rubbish heap or wasteland, where, with ultimate perversity, the only thing that grows is death" (197). Hence, this explicit representation of a waste land that connects Manhattan and Long Island articulates "an entropic vision of America" (127), which is subsequently developed on different symbolic and narrative levels throughout the novel.[76] The valley of ashes functions as a symbolic cornerstone, emphasizing the

[74] "…when they had torn open her shirtwaist, still damp with perspiration, they saw that her left breast was swinging loose like a flap, and there was no need to listen for the heartbeat beneath" (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 112).

[75] Note the verb 'to swarm'; cf. note 38 to the previous chapter, p. 217.

[76] As examined throughout the chapter, this entropic vision of America has a contextual foundation that is socially and economically determined. However, it is also inextricable from the "grim cosmology" (Steinbrink 158) that philosophically and scientifically characterized the turn of the century (see chapter 2.3, p. X), and which undoubtedly contributed to the prominence of the Waste Land myth (reinterpreted as a myth of degeneration) in the literature of the fin-de-siècle and of modernism. Steinbrink elaborates: "The truth seemed to be that history itself subscribed to the theory of entropy which was rapidly gaining currency in the early twentieth century. Writers and philosophers joined men of science in the discovery that the operant energy within any closed system tends to diminish in the course of time. The universe,

mythical dimension of a narrative that reinterprets the pre-modern myth of the Waste Land as to represent the moral and spiritual, but also social and economic sterility that characterized American society in the decade of 1920. As it has been repeatedly explained, the myth of the Waste Land establishes that the cause of the land's infertility is to be found in the sterility and sexual incapacity of the Fisher King, as the myth presupposes an inextricable sympathetic connection between the health and the reproductive capacity of the king and the prosperity of his kingdom. In *The Great Gatsby*, as opposed to what happened in *Manhattan Transfer*, there is a clearly-defined Fisher-King figure in the Waste Land of New York: George Wilson, the only distinguishable man in the formless mass of ashen men that inhabit the valley of ashes, and thus, arguably, the only *living* man that endures among the ash heaps. Yet his position within the narrative unavoidably transforms the foundations of the mythical pattern the character incarnates, for far from being portrayed as *responsible* for the plight that plagues his kingdom—the valley of ashes—Wilson is shown as a victim of contagion, so to speak. He is the owner of an unproductive garage which has fallen victim to the hollow transactional relationships that have replaced production economics with the unproductiveness of speculative capitalism that has enriched the well-off socialites of New York. Their financial success has no foundation, as it is the result of speculation, and thus their apparent buoyancy is in truth unreal. In a celebrated passage, Nick describes the crowd waiting to enter one of Gatsby's extravagant parties:[77]

> I was struck by the number of young Englishmen dotted about; all well dressed, all looking a little hungry, and all talking in low, earnest voices to solid and prosperous Americans. I was sure they were selling something: bonds or insurance or automobiles. They were at least agonizingly aware of the easy money in the vicinity and convinced that it was theirs for a few words in the right key. (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 33)

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they declared, was in fact running downhill—like a clock with an ever-relaxing mainspring—its suns growing dimmer, its planets spinning and orbiting more slowly, its capacity to sustain life always dwindling" (158).

[77] Before he is invited to one of Gatsby's famous parties, Nick describes their extravagance: "There was music from my neighbour's house through the summer nights. In his blue gardens men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and he champagne and the stars. At high tide in the afternoon I watched his guests diving from the tower of his raft, or taking the sun on the hot sand of his beach while his motor-boats slid the waters of the Sound, drawing aquaplanes over cataracts of foam. On week-ends his Rolls-Royce became an omnibus, bearing parties to and from the city between nine in the morning and long past midnight, while his station wagon scampered like a brisk yellow bug to meet all trains. And on Mondays eight servants, including an extra gardener, toiled all day with mops and scrubbing-brushes and hammers and garden-shears, repairing the ravages of the night before" (31).

This brief excerpt illustrates rather eloquently the contradictions raised by the economic system described in the novel, as it opposes a group of prosperous Americans and group of hungry-looking Englishmen who, aware of "easy money in the vicinity," are looking for their due. They intend to sell bonds, insurance or automobiles; that is to say, they intend to take part in the speculative trading that, as it seems to Nick—himself a stockbroker: "I decided to go East and learn the bond business. Everybody I knew was in the bond business, so I supposed it could support one more single man" (2)—has proven to be extremely profitable for the "solid and prosperous" Americans. Nick does not realize that such "easy money" has made him and his fellow investors rich only in appearance. His mistake is understandable though, for Nick has taken part "in that delayed Teutonic migration known as the Great War" (2) and has thus witnessed first-hand the complete collapse of the European ideal of progress, and of its associated political and economical enterprises. In contrast, surely, the buoyant economy of the United States may seem solid and prosperous; however, as the immediate historical developments would demonstrate, such an assumption was certainly incorrect, which might be intuited through a close reading of the symbolic strategies traceable in Fitzgerald's novel.

These symbolic strategies represent the speculative economy that has enriched the characters of *The Great Gatsby* not only as feeble and unproductive, but as ultimately deleterious. "Easy money" is obtained by trading bonds, insurance and automobiles but, as Valls Oyarzun argues, bonds and insurance are commodities that lack an intrinsic value; they are abstract entities, the value of which is assigned arbitrarily and fluctuates depending on how the economy evolves ("Genealogía" 224). Bonds and insurance are not proper goods, which demonstrates that the economy that generates the exuberant wealth depicted in Fitzgerald's novel is no longer a production economy because, as Karl Marx's well-known initial words in *Das Kapital* explain, "the wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as 'an immense accumulation of commodities'" (35). The currency of money thus "requires that a given value in the shape of a commodity shall begin the process, and shall, also in the shape of a commodity, end it. The movement of the commodity is therefore a circuit" (114). But this circuit of commodities is non-existent in the economic system depicted in *The Great Gatsby*. As Valls Oyarzun explains, all goods in the novel are consumer goods that appear alienated from the productive powers of the labourers who

produced them, and effectively stop the circulation of capital; in consequence, the compulsive consumers portrayed in the novel are in fact presented as hoarders in the Marxist sense, and thus as a sterile economic force that truncates the possibility of real economic growth ("Genealogía" 225).[78] Moreover, when goods are sold, the money obtained is invested in bonds and insurance, which are subsequently re-sold and bought time and again. Money thus never transforms into goods, but crystallizes as money, which brings about a new form of hoarding:

> Commodities are thus sold not for the purpose of buying others, but in order to replace their commodity-form by their money-form. From being the mere means of effecting the circulation of commodities, this change of form becomes the end and aim. The changed form of the commodity is thus prevented from functioning as its unconditionally alienable form, or as its merely transient money-form. The money becomes petrified into a hoard, and the seller becomes a hoarder of money. (Marx 130)

THE KING OF ASHES

The characters of the novel are in fact hoarders, since their participation in the circulation of commodities fracture the circuit, crystallizing the value of goods into the unreal and fluctuating value of money, which is in fact artificially manipulated by the mechanisms of a speculative capitalism. In a production economy, the value of commodities equates "the labour-time necessary for its production" (Marx 55), but such value cannot be attributed to bonds and insurance. It can however be attributed to automobiles, it would seem, as they in origin posses use-value and also an intrinsic value that can be equated to the labour time and labour powers necessary for their production. However, that real value is annihilated in Fitzgerald's novel, as Valls Oyarzun notes when he argues that automobiles in *The Great Gatsby* have exchange-value rather than use-value, as they operate more as an emblem of (usually false) social status and less as a means of transport (227). This is quite evident in the struggles of

[78] I have paraphrased from the original in Spanish: "Cuando el objeto producido aparece en la novela lo hace siempre en forma de bien de consumo, es decir, alienado de la fuerza productiva. Además, en la mayoría de los casos, ese bien de consumo suele poner fin al ciclo del capital. El consumidor compulsivo que puebla las páginas del libro resulta ser, por tanto, un atesorador en el sentido marxista del término, es decir, una fuerza económica estéril que desactiva las posibilidades reales del sistema económico al que pertenece" ("Genealogía" 225).

George Wilson, the garage-owner who functions as a Fisher-King figure. He practically *begs* Tom Buchannan, one of the richest among the (apparently) rich:

> 'I didn't mean to interrupt your lunch,' he said. 'But I need money pretty bad, and I was wondering what you were going to do with your old car.'
> 'How do you like this one?' inquired Tom. 'I bought it last week.'
> 'It's a nice yellow one,' said Wilson, as he strained at the handle.
> 'Like to buy it?'
> 'Big chance,' Wilson smiled faintly. 'No, but I could make some money on the other.'
> 'What do you want money for, all of a sudden?'
> 'I've been here too long. I want to get away. My wife and I want to go West.' (*Gatsby* 99)

Wilson's desire to "go West" is certainly significant and will be discussed further on. First however it is necessary to clarify that the yellow car that Tom prides himself on—which he is intending to sell, having bought it only a week before, according to what he deceitfully tells Wilson—is actually Gatsby's car. Hence Tom's lie reveals the function of automobiles as a (false) token of social ostentation, but the exchange between both characters discloses the truth about the value of cars as commodities: they are bought seemingly just to be sold again. They have no use-value; their value cannot be equated to the labour time and forces involved in their production, because the speculative purchase of cars with the sole purpose of selling them—as it is implicit in Tom's offer—generates an unreal surplus value, revealing that, in the unproductive economy described in the novel, automobiles are no different from bonds and insurance. Their value is arbitrary, and they generate "easy money" that does not result from a true *production* of capital. George Wilson represents the labourers; the productive class in the novel. Yet, as it will be subsequently argued, he is depicted as the impotent Maimed King of a desert ghost kingdom where the only inhabitants that have not melted into ashes are himself and his profoundly discontent wife, Myrtle.

For indeed, Wilson may arguably be considered a king figure insofar as he is the emblem of his class, that is, the labourers whose productive powers should sustain and generate the wealth of the community as a whole. In this view, the prosperity of the kingdom, so to speak, should depend on Wilson's productive capacity as representative of the labour forces that determine the value of the commodities accumulated by the buoyant capitalist economy that has enriched the socialites of Long Island. Yet as his conversation with Tom reveals, Wilson can only survive—temporarily, as it will be

explained—by taking part in the speculative game that has, paradoxically, rendered him useless and hence unnecessary as a production force. His fate is thus set, but, of course, from a mythical perspective, so is the fate of the community as a whole, which in turn has degenerated into a Waste Land that can never be restored. For the wealth of the Waste Land is determined by the value of the commodities it accumulates, but that value is non-existent; it is speculative, unreal and arbitrary. There is no production in the Waste Land 'governed' by Wilson, so commodities do not have a real, intrinsic value that can be measured in terms of their costs of production. Symbolically, these worthless commodities characterize the barrenness of a society that is in fact an economic and moral vacuum. This is most eloquent in the case of automobiles. Nick narrates:

> A dead man passed us in a hearse, heaped with blooms, followed by two carriages with drawn blinds, and by more cheerful carriages for friends. The friends looked out at us with the tragic eyes and short upper lips of south-eastern Europe, and I was glad that the sight of Gatsby splendid car was included in the sombre holiday. As we crossed Blackwell's island to limousine passed us, driven by a white chauffeur, in which sat three modish negroes, two bucks and a girl. I laughed aloud as the yolks of their eyeballs rolled towards us in haughty rivalry. (*Gatsby* 55)

Nick describes Gatsby's splendid car as having brightened up a funeral, but soon enough the scene becomes prophetically ominous: Myrtle Wilson will be run over by Gatsby's yellow car, triggering the tragic dénouement in the novel and thus expressively exemplifying how automobiles characterize the vacuity and worthlessness of the (false) prosperity portrayed in the text while also advancing the plot. Both functions are thus made inextricable, for the tragic ending of the novel is the direct consequence of the destructive forces of the communitarian structures symbolized by Gatsby's splendid car. Because as Marx wrote, "along with the useful qualities of the products themselves, we put out of sight both the useful character of the various kinds of labour embodied in them, and the concrete forms of that labour" (38). Thus, the annihilation of the use value of the automobiles—and its substitution by an ostentatious, speculative value—brings along the annihilation of the labour embodied in them; that is to say, the annihilation of the working class, emblematized by Wilson and his wife, thus conveniently—and meaningfully—killed by Gatsby's yellow war.

Wilson, a clear victim of the speculative game, cannot produce (or even repair) cars. He can only buy the cars that have no value for the richer class and then sell the pieces at a loss. "*Cars bought and sold*," reads a sign on Wilson's "unprosperous and bare" garage (*Gatsby* 19).[79] It is "the only building in sight (…) a small block of yellow brick sitting on the edge of the waste land" (19). Wilson, the king of the "waste land," is inseparable from the environment, "mingling immediately with the cement colour of the walls. A white ashen dust veiled his dark suit and his pale hair as it veiled everything in the vicinity" (20). He is of course sick: "a blond, spiritless man, anaemic, and faintly handsome" (19). As Nick hypothesizes, his sickness may have a psychological cause, and becomes more acute when he finds out about his wife's infidelity: "the shock had made him physically sick (…) Wilson was so sick that he looked guilty, unforgivably guilty —as if he had just got some poor girl with child" (100). Oddly, Nick seems to make Wilson responsible of his own malady, as if he was to blame for Myrtle's betrayal. Yet Nick's simile, "as if he had just got some poor girl with child" is so apparently random that it almost sounds like a morbid joke when the Wilson's entire narrative is taken into consideration, because in fact Myrtle's infidelity seems to have been motivated by Wilson's sexual impotence. She justifies her actions by claiming that, "I married him because I thought he was a gentleman… I knew right away that I made a mistake" (27-28). The ambiguity of Myrtle's explanation seems to be partially clarified when Nick observes that "he was his wife's man and not his own" (111), hinting at Wilson's emasculation. When Myrtle dies, Wilson's friend Michaelis inquires him twice, "did you ever have any children?" (128). He never replies, but the unvoiced answer is obvious, and, at last, the concatenation of elements that suggest that Wilson is in fact impotent becomes evident. This circumstance, taking into consideration Nick's comment about Wilson's feelings of guilt, is thus represented as the cause to Wilson's remorse, which Nick perceives as the etiology of Wilson's sickness. But Wilson is not responsible for his bad health and, more importantly for a myth-critical interpretation, neither is he responsible for the wasting of his 'kingdom': "'I'm sick,' said Wilson without moving. 'Been sick all day.' (…) 'I'm all run down. (…) I've been here too long. I want to get away. My wife and I want to go West'" (99).

[79] The symbolism is in fact correlative to the historical development of the automobile industry, as Leuchtenburg explains: "The prosperity of the 1920's had been founded on construction and the automobile industry (...). The automobile industry continued to grow, but after 1925 it grew at a much slower rate, cutting back purchases of steel and other material; the cycle of events, whereby an increase in car production produced rapid increases in steel, rubber, glass, and other industries, now operated in a reverse manner to speed the country toward a major depression" (245).

Arguably, it is the East which runs the character down, because Wilson has lived "too long" in the valley of ashes. He truly believes that if he travels west and escapes the Waste Land, he and his wife will be saved, as if the cause of his misfortune—the sexual frustration and barrenness of his marriage—were the fault of the land, and not vice-versa, as established by the original pattern of the Waste Land myth. He is of course wrong to believe in the ideal conception of the West as a mythical land of plenty that can bring about communal and individual regeneration, as demonstrated by the experience of western characters who only find in the West a place of wildness and debauchery or a place of utter boredom. But he is right in blaming the "waste land" of New York for his own sickness—which reverses the ideological foundation of the Waste Land myth—because his sexual incapacity is in fact the mythologization of his economic unproductiveness which renders him useless, unnecessary, and thus condemns him to disappear within the economic and social system that regulates life in the novel. The king is thus not to be blamed for the misfortune of the land in the reinterpreted myth of the Waste Land as represented in *The Great Gatsby*; contrarily, the Waste Land is to be blamed for the misfortune of the king. The ideological consequences of this inversion are inescapably catastrophic, of course. The narrative pattern of the pre-modern myth—understood in the 1920s as the narrative development of a ritual of collective regeneration—dictates that they Maimed King must either be healed or sacrificed so that the land can be restored to its prosperity. However, as represented in *The Great Gatsby*, the fate of the land no longer depends on the health of the king. As it happened in *Manhattan Transfer*, a novel in which the modern city was inherently a Waste Land by virtue of being a modern city, in Fitzgerald's novel the mythical land of New York is also inherently (and mythically) a Waste Land. There are thus no hopes of restoration because, as Steinbrink explains, in *The Great Gatsby*, "regeneration and renewal are myths, or at best metaphors, rather than real possibilities of actual life" (158).

THE UNREALITY OF REALITY

If George Wilson, the Maimed King of the Valley of Ashes, is in fact the victim of an economic and social system that is doomed to collapse, Jay Gatsby—whose platonic

self-conception is perceived by Nick as a sort of incorruptible ideal that shields the character from the rottenness and corruption of the community—is in turn the emblem of such ill-fated system. Gatsby's idealized, unreal existence as the embodiment of a platonic conception of himself constitutes the individual incarnation of a social ideal, an unreal communitarian buoyant existence that is only made possible insofar as the real production economy—and its labour power, incarnated in Wilson—is obliterated. Jay Gatbsy is an ideal; his entire existence is a fiction. But to exist as an ideal James Gatz must erase his own reality first, an action emblematized in the erasure of his name, James, of which he keeps only the initial J (pronounced *jay*). Nick describes this process of self-idealization as he imagines it:

> A universe of ineffable gaudiness spun itself out in his brain while the clock ticked on the washstand and the moon soaked with wet light his tangled clothes upon the floor. Each night he added to the pattern of his fancies until drowsiness closed down upon some vivid scene with an oblivious embrace. For a while these reveries provided an outlet for his imagination; they were a satisfactory hint of the unreality of reality, a promise that the rock of the world was founded securely on a fairy's wing. (80)

Gatsby's process of self-creation as a platonic conception of himself seems to satisfy his desire to experience "the unreality of reality." But this process of self-erasure—that is, of obliterating his *real self*—and platonic self-making is in fact a correlative—in the sphere of the individual's consciousness—of a social and economic system that has erased *real* production economy and replaced it with the ideal, unreal buoyancy generated *ex nihilo*. Spengler writes,

> Money, as the form of economic intercourse within the waking-consciousness, is no more limited in potential scope by actuality than are the quantities of the mathematical and the logical world. (...) [I]n the developed megalopolitan economics there is no longer any inherent objection to increasing 'money' or to thinking, so to say, in other money-dimensions. This has nothing to do with the availability of gold or with any values in actuality at all. (...) Money has become, for man as an economic animal, a form of the activity of waking-consciousness, having no longer any roots in Being. (98)

"Developed megalopolitan economics" are not limited by actuality in the same sense that Jay Gatsby's platonic conception of himself is not limited by actuality. His individual aspiration—his "incorruptible dream"—is thus configured as the correlative of a social ideal of exorbitant wealth and unlimited progress that is in fact unreal and

unproductive, and has no connection with "any values in actuality at all." If Jay Gatsby is thus the personalized correlative of the American "incorruptible" dream, he represents the unreality and groundlessness of that communitarian ideal which, as represented in the novel, erases the production powers that should generate wealth for the entire community. Wilson, the emblem of such social and economic erasure, kills Gatsby at the end, because it is Gatsby's existence—as correlative of the speculative, unreal economy that distributes wealth in their community—that has previously erased Wilson's reality.

In truth, though, the economic unproductiveness Wilson's valley of ashes is only the emblem of the generalized malady that affects the entire community and that seems to infect every landscape depicted in the novel. West Egg is described as containing "a hundred houses, at once conventional and grotesque, crouching under a sullen, overhanging sky and a lustreless moon" (*Gatsby* 145). In Manhattan, among "the constant flicker of men and women and machines" (46), Nick feels "a haunting loneliness sometimes" in himself and in others, "young clerks in the dust, wasting the most poignant moments of night and life" (46). The men, women and *machines* of Manhattan are also living "in the dust," "wasting" their lives. The literal "waste land" of the valley of ashes is thus only the 'ideogram' that signifies a collective barren and lifeless existence that is "as sordid, loveless, commercial, and dead as the ash heaps presided over by the eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg" (Lewis 48).

From his singularized position in the valley of ashes, Wilson looks up at the billboard advertisement of an optician that left town a long time ago, and murmurs: "God sees everything," (*Gatsby* 131). "That's an advertisement" (131), his friend Michaelis replies, eloquently illustrating how Wilson's misplaced faith conveys the religious degeneration of the times, succinctly described by Leuchtenburg as "the secularization of religion and the religiosity of business" (1989). As he writes, in the decade of 1920 "religion was valued not as a path to personal salvation or a key to the riddles of the universe but because it paid off in dollars and cents" (189). Only a fake and short-sighted advertisement of a god, who fled the city long ago, can watch over the Waste Land of New York and take care of its sick king. Traditionally, as it has been recurrently argued, God—the supreme source of the anointed king's divine power—stands in as the legitimizing force that gives account of the transcendental significance of the medieval myth. The King of the Waste Land is divine only insofar as his kingly power derives from God, so that, in truth, God's Grace is the transcendental force that

establishes, arbitrates and legitimizes the social and political structures that articulate the life of the community. The death of God,[80] symbolized in His transmutation into a billboard advertisement in *The Great Gatsby*, undermines the ideological foundations of the social and political structures legitimized in the pre-modern Waste Land myth, and once again gives account of the impossibility of communitarian regeneration because, in a world "that has become a moral and spiritual wasteland" (Parr 60), it is no longer possible to have faith in God as the supreme transcendence that can preternaturally set in order the chaos of the world, and thus ensure the eternally-recurrent regeneration of the community.

As (misguidedly) perceived by Nick's romantic imagination, the chaos of the valley of ashes seems to still be superimposed over a sort of transcendental order. He considers: "It had occurred to me that this shadow of a garage must be a blind, and that sumptuous and romantic apartments were concealed overhead" (*Gatsby* 19). The apparently trivial observation is an extremely eloquent expression of the symbolic dimension of the novel, because those "sumptuous and romantic apartments" are not real; they only exist in Nick's hyperaesthetic imagination. And the same could also be said of every luxurious location recreated in the text because, as explained, the exorbitant wealth of the rich socialites portrayed in the novel is only a sort of unreal mirage that is conjured up over the "waste land" that is the valley of ashes, i.e., the governing symbol that signifies the unproductiveness and thus the groundlessness of the opulence that characterizes the morally and spiritually barren existence of the richest among the rich. For as Malcom Bradbury explained, *The Great Gatsby* "is the story of a gross, materialistic, careless society of coarse wealth spread on top of a sterile world; on to it is cast an extraordinary illusion, that of the ex-Jay Gatz—the self-created Gatsby[,] a man whose poor past and corrupt economy supports are hidden in his own glow" (*Novel* 87). But this extraordinary illusion cast over the sterile world is bound to vanish and collapse. Jay Gatsby's glow is bound to be swallowed by the "[the] foul dust [that] floated in the wake of his dreams" (*Gatsby* 2), so that, at the end of the novel, "the valley of ashes claims the dreamer" (Lehan *Gatsby* 97).

As Wilson approaches Gatsby at the end of the novel, intending to kill him, he is described as "that ashen, fantastic figure gliding toward [Gatsby] through the amorphous trees" (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 132). Wilson, ashen and fantastic, is described

[80] See p. 142.

once again as inextricable from the Waste Land he lives (and reigns) in. He personally thus embodies the "foul dust" floating in the wake of Gatsby's dream, a dream that only concludes when Gatsby dies. For Gatsby *is* his dream; his existence as Jay Gatsby—instead of as James Gatz—is possible insofar as he remains faithful to that platonic conception of himself upon which he has designed and defined his idealized identity. He dies because he falls in the trap set by Tom and Daisy so that he is blamed for their crimes, because being Gatsby inevitably means that he must believe in Daisy. The consequence is that Wilson kills him, committing suicide immediately afterwards, and thus, as it will be explained, reversing completely the archetypal pattern of the Waste Land myth.[81]

All throughout the novel, Gatsby longs to be loved by Daisy, Tom's wife and a woman he had been sexually involved with in the past. As Nick tries to explain this desire, he uses a rather expressive analogy:

> He took what he could get, ravenously and unscrupulously—eventually he took Daisy one still October night, took her because he had no real right to touch her hand.
> He might have despised himself, for he had certainly taken her under false pretences (…) he let her believe that he was a person from much the same state as herself—that he was fully able to take care of her. (…) Bu he didn't despise himself and it didn't turn out as he had imagined. He had intended, probably, to take what he could and go—but now he found that he had committed himself to the following of a grail. (121-122)

Gatsby, in his pursuit of Daisy's love, "had committed himself to the following of a grail;" the 'following', Nick imagines, instead of the 'quest' or the 'finding'. Because Gatsby is in fact committed to the pursuit of an ideal that he knows beforehand to be unattainable, insofar as it is but another manifestation of 'the unreality of reality:' "'Oh, you want too much!' She cried to Gatsby. I love you now, isn't that enough? I can't help what's past.' She began to sob helplessly. 'I did love [Tom] once—but I loved you

[81] Significantly, from a symbolic perspective, Gatsby is getting ready to swim in the pool when Wilson shoots him, and, as he dies, he falls into the water. As he tells Nick right before, he had not used the pool all summer, and wanted to swim before the gardener drained it now that the dead leaves of autumn had started to fall and were clustering in the stagnant water. The significance of water as a symbol of death thus recurs in *The Great Gatsby*, most eloquently as Nick described the moment when Gatsby's body is found: "There was a faint, barely perceptible movement, of the water as the fresh flow from one end urged its way toward the drain at the other. With little ripples that were hardly the shadows of waves, the laden mattress moved irregularly down the pool. A small gust of wind that scarcely corrugated the surface was enough to disturb its accidental course with its accidental burden. The touch of a cluster of leaves revolved it slowly, tracing, like the leg of transit, a thin red circle in the water" (133).

too.'" (107). Gatsby does not want Daisy to abandon her husband to be with him; he wants her to change the past. He does not want her love now that he at last occupies the same social stratum as her; he wants an immutable stasis of her love, an ideal of her love that can remain changeless in the past, the present and the future. Nick recognizes that desire to be condemned to perpetual dissatisfaction, and thus characterizes it as the (never-ending) following of a grail which, as opposed to the presuppositions of medieval romance, is known to be forever unattainable.

Gatsby is thus explicitly identified with a sort of Grail-Knight figure. The mission of the Grail knight in the medieval myth is to restore the Waste Land but, as explained throughout the chapter, Gatsby's existence as the individual incarnation of the social ideal that constitutes the only-apparent glow of his community is only possible insofar as the realization of 'the unreality of reality' erases the foundations of that reality; that is to say, Gatsby—in so far as his incorruptible dream exits in opposition to the physical and spiritual barrenness of the community—can only exist in the Waste Land, because it is the groundlessness of the community's unreal prosperity that makes it possible for Gatz to become Gatsby, the millionaire extravagant socialite who has made a fortune by resorting to an illegal exploitation of the speculative mechanisms of financial capitalism. He cannot then restore the Waste Land, because it is the Waste Land that makes possible his existence. As already explained, Wilson's incapacity is not the cause of the plight that afflicts his wasted kingdom; his being healed—or his sacrificial death—cannot then bring about the regeneration of the community. But even if it could, the novel expressively concludes with the Fisher-King figure killing the Grail Knight-figure, an action motivated by Tom and Daisy's refusal to take responsibility for their actions.

Tom was Myrtle's lover, and Daisy ran her over with her car, but as she had been driving Gatsby's car, Tom and Daisy lay the blame on him. Nick advices Gatsby to leave town for a while, but "he wouldn't consider it. He couldn't possibly leave Daisy until he knew what she was going to do" (120). Nick's analogy that Gatsby "had committed himself to the following of a grail" comes immediately after, revealed then as the narrator's effort to explain why Gatsby remained faithful to his *following* of an unattainable ideal that in fact functions as the materialization of his own "Platonic conception" of himself. The trap is inescapable: Gatsby may be identified with a romance-like knight insofar as he exists only within his Platonic conception of himself; yet his faithfulness to such "incorruptible dream" in fact determines the perverse

mythical inversion at the end of the novel, when the Fisher King is misled by the community into killing the Grail Knight who, according to the archetypical parameters of the myth, was the only man who could have saved them all.

But in *The Great Gatsby*, as it has been explained throughout the chapter, Gatsby could not have saved them all. His existence constitutes an annihilating force for Wilson. No salvation is thus ever possible. As reinterpreted in modernism, the Waste Land myth operates as a sort of aesthetic prism through which the alienated individual perceives the moral and spiritual sterility that plights the community. The myth thus isolates the individual in the same way that Nick's romanticised tale isolates Gatsby: "'They're a rotten crowd,' I shouted across the lawn. 'You're worth the whole damn bunch put together'" (126). Yet the only thing that in truth distinguishes Gatsby from the other characters is that his corruption constitutes a rotten means to what Nick believes to be an incorruptible aspiration: "The lawn and drive had been crowded with the faces of those who guessed at his corruption—and he had stood on those steps, concealing his incorruptible dream as he waved them goodbye" (126). But the dream is only incorruptible insofar as it is an unattainable platonic ideal. It exists only outside of—and in contrast with—the corruption and the sterility of the community. The Grail Knight may follow the Grail, but that Grail is an idealised, abstract, unattainable ideal that has no correspondence in reality. Daisy is evidently not incorruptible, except for the role she plays within Gatsby's platonic conception of his own existence.[82] Regeneration could only thus be possible within the dream, but Gatsby's self-idealization places him in the line of Wilson's fire, which brings about the ultimate inversion of the mythical structure that articulates Nick's misplaced romance.

H. L. Mencken notably summarized the ending of the novel:

> The garage keeper's wife, rushing out upon the road to escape her husband's third degree, is run down and killed by the wife of her lover. The garage keeper, misled by the lover, kills the lover of the lover's wife —the Great Gatsby himself. Another bullet, and the garage keeper is also reduce to offal. Choragus [=Nick] fades away. The crooked lady golfer departs. The lover of the garage keeper's wife goes back to his own consort. The immense house of the Great Gatsby stands idle, its bedrooms given over to the bat and the owl, its cocktail shakers dry. The curtain lurches down. (89-90)

[82] As Steinbrink writes, "Gatsby's dream of Daisy is perfect only until the tangible Daisy reappears" (167). For a more in-depth explanation of Daisy's function as a faulty incarnation of the Grail within the mythical structure of the novel, see pp. 304-305.

As the curtain lurches down, only abandonment and futile death remain. William Troy argued that "the book takes on the pattern and the meaning of a Grail-romance" (22), yet as argued through the chapter, Gatsby's differentiation as the individual incarnation of a social ideal proves to be deleterious for both himself and the community. The book does not take the pattern of a Grail romance, then, as much as *Nick's narrative* takes the pattern of a Grail romance because, as he himself admits, "when I came back from the East last autumn I felt that I wanted the world to be un uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever" (*Gatsby* 1). Thus from the traditionally-mythical West, he superimposes the pattern of a morally-ordered romance on his tale of the East, so that Gatsby's self-idealization can redeem him, *within Nick's romantic appreciation* of the story. Such romanticising strategy reveals in Nick a romantic temperament similar to that of Amory Blaine, the protagonist of *This Side of Paradise*, who believes that, "if living isn't seeking for the grail it may be a damned amusing game" (Fitzgerald *Paradise* 210). Disclosing a similar belief, Nick's romantic temperament attributes a transcendental meaning to Gatsby's materialization of his platonic conception of himself into his pursuit of fortune, allegedly a stepping stone in his following a grail. In doing so, Nick *mythologizes* Gatsby, and characterizes him as the contemporary counterpart of an ancient prototype of idealism. But such mythical ideal is anchored in the unattainable past of mythology which, despite being unreachable, Nick refuses to leave behind:

> Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms further… And one fine morning—
> So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past. (*Gatsby* 149)

The mythical ideals against which Nick measured reality—ideals as platonic as Gatsby's conception of himself—are in fact inherently redemptive, as is case of the Grail myth. But once these mythical ideals are superimposed over the overwhelming corruption of reality, they are immediately reshaped, reversed, and become immediately perverse. The heroes of romance in Nick's narrative do not travel from the Waste Land to the newly recovered Eden, but in the opposite direction. Gatsby observes the peninsula of West Egg and imagines that "the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I become aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch

sailors' eyes—a fresh, green breast of the new world" (148). The transition from the overwhelming sterility of the Waste Land to the abundant fertility of a mythical land of plenty—which effectively characterizes the movement of romance—is only possible, in the contemporary world, within the boundaries of Nick's imagination, "beat[ing] on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (149).

Nick's mythical imagination thus manages to salvage the hero by isolating him from the community, but only barely. When confronted with Wilson's (also mythical) sickness, Nick notices: "it occurred to me that there was no difference between men, in intelligence or race, so profound as the difference between the sick and the well" (100). When juxtaposing these words to Nick's judgement of the community as a "rotten crowd" and his remark that Gatsby is "worth the whole damn bunch put together" (126), it seems reasonable to argue that, from Nick's perspective (and within the boundaries of Nick's narrative), Gatsby is the only 'well' character in the 'sick' community. For in fact, the sickness that Nick detects in Wilson provokes in him a guilty conscience that, when extrapolated to the other characters, allows for the argument that the generalized sickness of the community is made manifest in the characters' irresponsibility. As Christopher Bigsby explains, the community "[is] lacking in moral responsibility and having no ethical basis for action. The chain of motor accidents which occur throughout the book merely provides evidence of the carelessness with which the characters conduct their lives" (135). "You're a rotten driver," Nick accuses Jordan, the woman he is involved with throughout the novel; "Suppose you met somebody just as careless as your are" (*Gatsby* 47). At the end, he narrates the fate of Tom and Daisy: "they were careless people, Tom and Daisy—they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they made" (147, my italics).[83] Carelessness kills Myrtle, but also Gatsby and Wilson, who die because the sick and rotten Tom and Daisy refuse to take responsibility. Gatsby's commitment to his own self-idealization—that is, his commitment to his role as Grail knight in Nick's

[83] The carelessness of the modern individual may truly be interpreted as inextricable from the degeneration of modern communities into physical and spiritual waste lands, because, as Hauhart explains: "Both the ash heaps in *Gatsby* and the garbage in Eliot's poem at lines 177–178 suggest a casual disposal of detritus without regard for the environment; that is, a form of carelessness that is voiced by Nick Carraway as one of the moral lapses of human action to be decried. More symbolically, both images can embody man's alienation from nature or even the corrupting influence of modernity as the modern city (London/New York) discards its used abundance, willy-nilly, at the edge of what was formerly paradise (The Thames/Long Island)" (200).

narrative—keeps him from running away and isolates him for the corruption of the community insofar as his faithfulness to the platonic conception of himself constitutes a form of individual responsibility that distinguishes him as 'well' among the crowd of sick, careless people. But once again his wellness, his ideal nature as a Grail-Knight figure, places him in the line of Wilson's fire. The ideal hero of a mythic past has no chance of survival—let alone redemption—in the contemporary Waste Land. Far from redeeming the wasted community he lives in, Gatsby is doomed to die a victim of the generalized sickness that cannot ever be healed. As opposed to what happened to Jimmy Herf in *Manhattan Transfer*, the last 'well' man does not survive in the Waste Land of the modern world recreated in *The Great Gatsby*. Terribly, apocalyptically, by the time the Waste Land of literary modernism is revisited only a year later in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, no "well" men remain; *everybody* has fallen irreparably sick.

CHAPTER 10

MYTH, RITUAL AND GENDER: ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S *THE SUN ALSO RISES*

EVERYBODY'S SICK

When Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* was published in 1926, critics defined it as "a book which, like its characters, begins nowhere and ends in nothing" (Stephens, ed. 31). It was also noted that "the keynote of 'The Sun Also Rises' is struck in the impotence of the hero" (35). Both assertions, as it will be explained throughout the chapter, are fundamental to this study as they are the key to understanding the process of mythical reinterpretation carried out in the novel. This analysis will focus on exploring the futility of the characters' (in)action along the narrative; because the lives of the characters—which "begin nowhere and end in nothing"—give account of a generalized state of degeneration symbolically signified by the aforementioned keynote of the text: Jake Barnes's sexual impotence. Such disability[84]—consequence of a wound suffered by the protagonist during the First World War—determines Jake's actions and

[84] Fore's interpretation of Hemingway's novel from the critical standpoint of disability studies advances the rather eloquent argument that Jack's destiny of frustration is conditioned by his internalization of the social stereotypes that equate disability with pathology (76). Significantly, the reutilization of myth in the novel reinforces such prevailing social and medical philosophy about Jake's injury, as it not only presupposes that disability equates a personal pathology, but also that it stands in as the symbolic signifier of a collective and incurable affliction. Arguably, then, the subversive reinterpretation of myth in the text helps to expose how cultural narratives of physical impairment "work unobtrusively and insistently to make disability into a 'master trope for human disqualification'" (85).

thus conditions the plot, which is developed around the frustrated love story of Jake and Lady Brett Ashley, a story of profound dissatisfaction that resonates time and time again throughout the novel. Moreover, on a more complex level, Jake's impotence functions as the symbolic cornerstone that sustains a network of mythical meanings that, ultimately, allow for the identification of Jake with the archetypical figure of the Fisher King, whose sickness—as Jake's—also afflicts the entire community. Yet once again, as in previously analyzed Fisher-King figures of American modernism, Jack is ultimately not to blame for the widespread malady that afflicts his environment, nor is he the cause of the symbolic impotence that also plights the other characters. Perhaps, Jack's literal impotence functions emblematically as the perceptible symptom of an underlying condition that does affect every character.

At the beginning of the novel, Jake converses about this all-pervading sickness with the prostitute Georgette—who he picks up in the street "because of a vague sentimental idea that it would be nice to eat with someone" (Hemingway 14)—in a very iconic scene:

> She cuddled against me and I put my arm around her. She looked up to be kissed. She touched me with one hand and I put her hand away.
> 'Never mind.'
> 'What's the matter? You sick?'
> 'Yes.
> 'Everybody's sick. (13)

As it can be observed, the sickness that Georgette attributes to 'everyone' is the same pathology that she detects in Jake when she touches him and he pulls her hand away; that is, she attributes to 'everyone' a generalized condition of sexual incapacity that is thus configured from the beginning as the keynote of the text, which is from that moment on struck repeatedly throughout the novel. Immediately afterwards, Jake introduces Georgette to her friends as his fiancée, referring to her as "Mademoiselle Georgette Leblanc," a joke at his own expense—as it references a famous lesbian soprano of the time (Nagel 104)—that insists on his sexual frustration, a circumstance emphasized when soon after they encounter Brett dancing with a group of homosexuals. In a quick, short string of scenes, every relationship depicted at the beginning of the novel clearly exposes a generalized condition of sexual inadequacy that Jake must successively confront as he grows more and more agitated. As he watches Brett dancing with her companions, he reflects: "I was very angry. Somehow they always made me

angry. I know they are supposed to be amusing, and you should be tolerant, but I wanted to swing on one, anyone, anything to shatter that superior, simpering composure. Instead I walked down the street and had a beer at the bar at the next Bal." (17) As Spilka explains, Brett's dancing is a "deliberate parody of normal love" (110) that highlights sexual frustration but that also subverts traditional gender roles, since Brett, "With a felt man's felt on her boyish bob, and with her familiar reference to men as fellow 'chaps', she completes the distortion of sexual roles" (110) that, as it will become evident at the end of the novel, frustrates a mythopoetic regeneration for the community of expatriates depicted in the novel. From the beginning, however, Brett's disregard and undermining of traditional sexual roles in favour of interactions that emphasize an overwhelming circumstance of sexual frustration deeply angers Jake, who feels as if his disability is being mocked. Yet, even as he wants to punch the men dancing with Brett, he renounces his desire for violence. His reaction is to repress his impulses and replace their satisfaction with inaction, which, of course, can only aggravate a pathology that generates precisely from a permanent feeling of frustration. This is made evident when, after Jake returns with his friends, Robert Cohn asks him what the matter is, and he simply replies, "Nothing. This whole show makes me sick is all" (Hemingway 18).

The "show" is certainly morbid, as it reveals the underlying collective disease. Spilka explains: "In some figurative manner these artists, writers, and derelicts have all been rendered impotent by the war. Thus, as Barnes presents them, they pass before us like a parade of sexual cripples (...) they are all incapable of love" (108). Such is the generalized pathology: an incapacity for love. But such sickness is made manifest symbolically through its symptom of sexual impotence, and, as Spilka notes, that wound and that incapacity for love are a direct consequence of the war, during which Jake suffered the injury that functions as "the key metaphor of life in the damaged, sterilizing, lost-generation post-war age" (Bradbury *Novel* 75). All survivors thus arguably share Jake's wound, for all have become the sick inhabitants of the post-war Waste Land. As Rovit and Brenner explain: "It is the 'dirty war' that has crippled [Jake], just as it has indirectly crippled the others who fritter and burn in the hells of the *bal musette* and in the pandemonic stampede of the *encierro*" (140).

The scenes of sexual frustration do not end with Brett dancing with a group of homosexuals; they multiply as the narrative progresses. That same night, after they leave the party, Jake and Brett get on a taxi: "'Kiss me just once before we get there.'

When the taxi stopped I got out and paid. Brett came out putting on her hat. She gave me her hand as she stepped down. Her hand was shaky. 'I say, do I look too much of a mess?'" (Hemingway 24). As Fore explains, "the furtive sexual pleasures that Brett gives Jake are few and far between, and expressed in the classic Hemingway modes of elision, understatement, and silence indicative of guilt" (86). This signifies a sense of inadequacy that does not come from the characters' incapacity to have sex, but from their adherence to the social prejudices and cultural narratives that associate Jake's wound and his incapacity for *generative* sexuality with an irreparable state of collective male degeneration (85). That explains why, later that same night, when Jake and Brett say goodbye, she tells him, "You make me ill" (29). The characters' frustration does not result only from their physical dissatisfaction. Not long after, on a different night, Jake and Brett dance to the beat of the drums. The scene raises expectations that the characters may sublimate their ungratified sexual desire through their dancing, but such expectations are immediately thwarted when the scene concludes, once again, in a sense of overwhelming (and repetitive[85]) dissatisfaction that serves to characterize Jake and Brett's dance as being ultimately as barren and frustrating as Brett's dance with the group of homosexuals in the previously discussed scene: "'Good-night, Brett,' I said, 'I'm sorry you feel rotten.' 'Good-night, Jake. Good-night, darling. I won't see you again.' We kissed standing at the door. She pushed me away. We kissed again. 'Oh, don't!' Brett said" (57).

The Sun Also Rises seems then to portray a whole community as being pathologically degenerate,[86] made up of wounded individuals (involved in sterile sexual relationships) who have survived the Great War, but have been irreparably harmed in battle. From the myth-critical perspective of this study, such generalized condition may in fact be analyzed as one more modernist representation of the pre-modern myth of the Waste Land. After all, other critics have already advanced this interpretation:

> *The Sun Also Rises* (…) takes the form of a twentieth-century version of the Waste Land myth. Jack Barnes is the maimed Fisher King, Brett Ashley the profaned grail and corrupting Queen, Robert Cohn the false knight, Pedro Romero the warrior-priest performing the ancient fertility rites. When the King arranged for the warrior-priest to fornicate with the Queen, the spirit of the rites was violated

[85] "We danced. It was crowded and close. 'Oh, Darling,' Brett said, 'I'm so miserable.' I had that feeling of going through something that has all happened before. 'You were happy a minute ago.' (…) 'Want to go?' I had the feeling as in a nightmare of it all being something repeated, something I had been through and that now I must go through again" (56).

[86] See the previous explanation about the theory of degeneration in chapter 6, p. 169.

> and the corruption spread. Both Brett and Jake sought water: she to cleanse herself, he to search for retreat and for life itself. Although the river and the sea provided Jake with temporary refuge, they could not make him whole or rid the Waste Land of its blight. Because of her unsexing by the war, Brett's union with any male remains sterile and destructive. So the novel ends as it began, with Jake and Brett riding in a taxicab in a circle, the circle representing not the renewing of cycles of nature but the repetitive aimless movements of sick beings. Separate and together, Brett and Jake survive in their malaise, she to pursue her empty hedonism, he to hold on to his unsustaining stoicism. (Backman 121)

While subscribing Backman's fundamental claim—that is, that *The Sun Also Rises* in fact represents the medieval myth of the Waste Land—this study cannot agree with certain assumptions about the myth and its representation in Hemingway's text contained in Backman's elucidation. One may surely argue that there is a corrupting queen, a false knight, and a warrior-priest in the pre-modern version of the myth, but such argument must be founded in the sources,[87] and, in any case, the system of correlations established by Backman needs to be justified by drawing evidence from the text. The aim of this chapter is precisely to do that; that is, to examine the varied thematic and symbolic elements in Hemingway's text that represent the Arthurian myth of the Waste Land—namely: the widespread sickness, the main character's sexual impotence, the sexual frustration that burdens so many characters, the presence of sacrificial fertility rites, and the possibility (or impossibility) of regeneration—and to explore their modernist reinterpretation.

[87] In Thomas Malory's romances there is a queen, "the Queen of the Waste Lands," who says of herself: ""I was called the queen of most riches in the world; and it pleased me never my riches so much as doth my poverty" (II 276). Yet the presence of such a queen is not corrupting in the slightest, quite the opposite, as her function is to help Sir Perceval in his knightly journey. Contrarily, there is in indeed a corrupting queen in *The Adventures of Art Son of Conn* (see Introduction, p. 7), the Irish mythical tale that Roger Sherman Loomis establishes as the prototype of the Waste Land myth (223). Even though the correlation between Irish mythology and Arthurian legend was not hypothesized until decades after the publication *The Sun Also Rises*, the archetype of the Evil Queen might have recurred in other (medieval and post-medieval) versions of the myth. On a different note, the *ab origine* connection between the myth of the Waste Land and varied pagan fertility rites had already been explored in the decade of 1920 by authors such as Jessie L. Weston or T. S. Eliot, and thus Backman may have this connection in mind when he associates Romero with the figure of a 'warrior-priest.' Finally, as it regards the existence of a false knight, perhaps it would be more accurate to refer to this figure as a *failed* knight. Sir Gawain, Sir Percival, Sir Bors or Sir Lancelot are all failed knights in Malory's romances since, due to different causes, they all fail in their attempt to find the Holy Grail. In Hemingway's novel, Robert Cohn may be identified with this figure—"ready to do battle for his lady love" (Hemingway 155)—insofar as Brett can be identified with a *profaned* Grail (so can Romero, as it will be later on argued, be identified with a Grail-Knight figure). But Backman never justifies the association between Brett and a profaned Grail. It bears questioning, in fact, if it is actually possible to profane a magical object such as the Grail, since the very structure of romance keeps those unworthy from ever finding it.

THE FISHER KING

To begin this examination of the representation and reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth in Hemingway's novel, it is necessary to analyze the governing metaphor of the text, that is, Jake's castrating wound, which somehow reverberates in all symbolic and mythical elements of the novel. Jake obverses himself: "Undressing, I looked at myself in the mirror of the big armoire beside the bed. (…) Of all the ways to be wounded. I suppose it was funny. (…) My head started to work. The old grievance. Well, it was a rotten way to be wounded and flying on a joke front like the Italian. In the Italian hospital we were going to form a society. It had a funny name in Italian" (Hemingway 26-7). Jack's comment about the possibility of forming a society with other maimed soldiers gives account of a notion already mentioned, that is, the notion that Jake's impotence does not affect him exclusively, but seems to be a generalized symptom that, in some way or another, seems to affect all who have survived the Great War.[88] All the characters share Jake's grievance because, as Bradbury argues, Jake's wound is a symbol of "th[e] almost intolerable intrusion of violence into the self [which] points to the modern exposure, the threat of death and annihilation, the vacancy of present history, the need for physical reality, which most of the major characters feel. It is the wound that leads on into a world of trauma, of sleeplessness, loss, consciousness of *nada*, the void in the universe" (*Novel* 99). But also, from a purely myth-critical perspective, Jake's literal castration explicitly distinguishes him as a Fisher-King figure, whose sickness also afflicts the rest of the community. For the sake of a contrastive analysis, it may be useful to recall Chrétien de Troyes's narration:

> And the maiden said: 'Good sir, I can assure you that he is a king, but he was wounded and maimed in the course of a battle so that he can no longer manage on his own, for he was struck by a javelin through both thighs and is still in so much pain that he cannot rise a horse. Whenever he wants to relax or to go out to enjoy himself, he has himself put in a boat and goes fishing with a hook: this is why he's called the Fisher King.' (424)

[88] Even though it may certainly be interpreted as a symbol of the emasculating effects of war, this 'collective impotence' in fact gives account of a historical reality that, as Fore argues, was the cause of "national fascination" (83). As Klover explains, "based on his treatment of veterans of the Great War, prominent physician and psychiatrist Wilhelm Stekel, in his monumental book *Impotence in the Male*, estimated that hundreds of thousands of soldiers were rendered impotent as a result of the war" (86).

Jake, wounded in battle like the Fisher King, also enjoys fishing. The four chapters that make up the central part of the novel in fact recount Jake and his friend Bill's trout-fishing trip to Burguete. During this journey, Spilka argues, "these men have left the wasteland for the green plains of health" (112). That is true on a literal sense, since, at the beginning of their trip, "the country was barren and rocks stuck up through the clay. There was no grass beside the road" (Hemingway 95). When they reach the Irati river, the landscape has transformed radically: "the trees were big and the foliage was thick but it was not gloomy. There was no undergrowth, only the smooth grass, very green and fresh (…). All the time we heard the cattle in the woods. (…) There were wild strawberries growing on the sunny side of the ridge in a little clearing in the trees" (102). And yet, in spite of the bucolic pastoral landscape, it is not possible to claim that Jake truly abandons the Waste Land to enter "the greens plains of health," because, ultimately, Jake cannot leave behind his life frustrations.[89] On the contrary, frustration ends up pervading even the most paradisal landscape of the novel. To this regard Edmund Wilson explained that "the dry sunlight and the green summer landscapes have been invested with a sinister quality which must be new in literature. One enjoys the sun and the green as one enjoys suckling pigs and Spanish wine, but the uneasiness and apprehension are undruggable" ("Hemingway" 20). Jake then can only aspire to "relax or to go out to enjoy himself," as the mythical Fisher King in Chrétien de Troyes's take. Any escape from his anxiety can only be temporary. Initially, Jake finds himself at peace:

> We stayed five days at Burguete and had good fishing. The nights were cold and the days were hot, and there was always a breeze in the heat of the day. It was hot enough so that it felt good to wade in to cold stream, and the sun dried you when you came out and sat on the bank. We found a stream with a pool deep enough to swim in. In the evenings we played three-hand bridge with an Englishman named Harris, who had walked over from Saint Jean Pied de Port and was stopped at the inn for fishing. He was very pleasant and went with us twice to the Irati River.

[89] This passage, as Savola argues, "invokes the central elements of pastoral convention: the presentation of city life as complex and of city people as corrupt, the presentation of rural life (and of nature) as somehow more "real" and more simple than life in the city, and the presentation of rural folk as more honest, direct, and virtuous than city dwellers" (27). However, this invocation of pastoral tropes, as Savola also notes, is "sharply critical" (28) and self-conscious, and can thus be associated with Leo Marx's notion of a "complex pastoral;" that is to say, a kind of pastoral that does not "permit us to come away with anything like the simple, affirmative attitude we adopt toward pleasing rural scenery. In one way or another, if only by virtue of the unmistakable sophistication with which they are composed, these works manage to qualify, or call into question, or bring irony to bear against the illusion of peace and harmony in a green pasture" (Marx 25). As Marx himself explains, this is the short of pastoral that can be found in Hemingway's novels (362).

> There was no word from Robert Cohn nor from Brett and Mike. (Hemingway 109)

The comfort that Jack obtains from fishing is only momentary, however. Just as Mike's telegram suddenly interrupts their peaceful trip, Jake's personal frustration also overcomes him as soon as he is done fishing on the first day of the trip, when he sits "against the trunk of two of the trees that grew together" (105) to read for a little while, as he waits for Bill to finish his fishing. The symbolic meaning of the two trees growing together in a symbiotic and fulfilling union is immediately counter-effected by the story that Jake reads: "I was reading a wonderful story about a man who had been frozen in the Alps and then fallen into a glacier and disappeared, and his bride was going to wait twenty-four years exactly for his body to come out on the moraine, while her true love waited too, and they were still waiting when Bill came up" (105). Unavoidably, the story of a woman who must wait for twenty-four years to recover the frozen body of her fiancé, while her true love waits for her, recalls Jake's own story of dissatisfaction and unconsummated love. Frustration thus begins to creep on him, a circumstance that only intensifies when his feeling of achievement for the trout he has fished vanishes as soon as he realizes that Bill's are considerably bigger:

> 'How are yours?'
> 'Smaller.'
> 'Let's see them.'
> 'They're packed.'
> 'How big are they, really?'
> 'They're all about the size of your smallest.'
> 'You're not holding out on me?'
> 'I wish I were.'
> 'Get them all on worms?'
> 'Yes.'
> 'You lazy bum!'(105)

Besides the evident sexual connotations traceable in the characters' conversation about the size of their trout, and how Jake's smaller trout somehow insist, symbolically, on the character's castration, it is crucial to bear in mind that Jake's trout are in fact smaller because he has gotten them all on worms, while Bill, Jake notices, "was wet from the waist down and I knew he must have been wading the stream" (105). The mythical Fisher King, as quoted, "goes fishing with a hook" because, due to his wound "through both thighs," he cannot stand. Jake can stand on his feet, yet he fishes sitting

on a timber. Thus, even fishing—the one pleasurable activity that Jake can fully enjoy—is ultimately spoiled by the character's inaction and, ultimately, proves to be as futile and frustrating as anything else in his life. As Von Cannon argues, "*The Sun Also Rises* does not permit successful escape, recovery of the past, or future reconstruction" (65). This makes sense in the post-war ideological context since, as Von Cannon notes, "if the noble rhetoric of the past and its leaders brought about the war's atrocities, then Jake's retreat inevitably critiques the idyllic, whether that be a prewar existence or an absolute past characterized by the novel's Spanish settings" (66).[90]

A RITUAL OF EMASCULATION

As it will be argued throughout the rest of this chapter, bullfighting—the "absolute past characterized by the novel's Spanish settings"—operates similarly to fishing in the text, from a myth-critical perspective. The fiesta in Pamplona constitutes the climactic point in the narrative, but, once again, it ends in frustration and futility, a circumstance which in fact completes and concludes the process of mythical representation and reinterpretation carried out in the text. Rena Sanderson explains,

> In turning away from the sexual anarchy of the times, Hemingway adopted a kind of philosophical primitivism. In this he resembled many others of his generation who developed, in reaction to modern complexities, to moral and aesthetic interest in the primitive (...) Stimulated by such critiques as Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (1918) and T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), they undertook a quest for essential values that modern civilization, in their view, had abandoned. This quest took highly diverse forms, such as the interest in ancient myths and rituals. (174-5)

From Sanderson's perspective, bullfighting can then be interpreted as one of these primitive rituals which seem to contain in their performance and teleology the moral

[90] In Von Cannon's argument, the traumatic alter-effects of war are in fact traceable in the supposedly idyllic fishing trip. He explains: "In *The Sun Also Rises* Jake and Bill's fishing trip to Burguete suggests a retreat but, upon closer inspection, is filled with the counterforce of violence and death. (…) [W]hen Jake catches a trout he bangs the fish's "head against the timber so that he quivered out straight" and then "slit them all and shucked out the insides, gills and all, and tossed them over across the river" (*SAR* 124). The personification of the trout ("he") and the details of gutting fish hint at a battle between Jake and the trout and then, more strikingly, associate cleaning fish with bayonet fighting. The narrative also animalizes Jake; his preoccupation with hunger and prey compare him to a carnivorous animal. In these passages, humankind and animal kingdom become one. Far from offering a harmonious pastoral retreat, the natural world reflects man's irrationality, bloodlust, and bestial behavior during war" (68-69).

and aesthetic values that were supposedly lacking in contemporary society at the time. Manifestly, bullfighting entails a ritual sacrifice, for, as Pitt-Rivers explains, bullfighting does not involve actual *fighting*, as the bull cannot ever win, even if the bullfighter is injured or killed. In these cases, a second bullfighter must complete the ritual (109-108).[91] Up until now, the study of the Waste Land myth as it is reinterpreted in American modernism has taken into account the anthropological hypotheses of authors such as Weston and Frazer, who had established the connection between the myths of romance and primitive sacrificial life rites. However, even if bullfighting may be considered as a sacrificial rite, it is necessary to demonstrate that such rite is in fact a *fertility* rite, so that a solid association can be established between bullfighting as a sacrificial ritual and the Waste Land myth which, in the decade of 1920, as repeatedly explained, was considered to be the narrative evolution of a primeval life rite. Only then may bullfighting be interpreted as correlative to fishing, for instance; and as a symbolic significant of the all-encompassing physical and spiritual sterility that characterizes life in the Waste Land reinterpreted in *The Sun Also Rises*.

To this regard, Pitt-Rivers asserts that bullfighting is a fertility rite because the bull represents the "tireless coupling capacity attributed to animals" and also combines, as a symbol, male moral virtues and animal virtues that ensure fertility (111).[92] He reinforces his argument by mentioning a medieval ceremony that he argues may be the origin of contemporary bullfighting: the 'toro nupcial' (in English, 'nuptial bull'). As he explains, during this marriage ceremony, a bull was sacrificed; the bridegroom was in charge of piercing the bull's neck with the *banderillas*, which were embroidered by the bride, while using a piece of his clothing as red cape (112).[93] From this argument, one may conclude that, in fact, the rites of bullfighting were originally connected to wedding rites, and thus were performed to ensure the fecundity of a couple. Shubert validates the connection between these rites in the middle ages, explaining that, "as the

[91] "La corrida de toros, también llamada *lidia* (pelea), no es realmente una lucha como tal: el toro no puede ganar, aún si mata o lastima al matador. En este caso, uno de los otros matadores (…) deberá remplazarlo y completar el rito" (Pitt-Rivers 109-10) It is true that ocassionally the bull may 'earn a pardon' and be spared. However, this is an exceptional circumstance and is not included in the archetypal pattern of the bullfight.

[92] "El toro representa la infatigable capacidad de copulación que se atribuye a los animales (…) El toro combina, como símbolo (…), las virtudes morales masculinas, pero también la virtud animal necesaria para asegurar la fertilidad" (Pitt-Rivers 111).

[93] "El 'toro nupcial' era sacrificado en la Edad Media con motivo de una boda y se esperaba que el novio pusiera las banderillas, bordadas manualmente por su novia, en el morrillo del toro, empleando como capa de lidia un pedazo de su vestimenta" (Pitt-Rivers 112).

nobility used bulls to help celebrate royal weddings,[94] ordinary Spaniards had incorporated bulls into a number of rituals of their own. Many of these were also related to marriage, with the idea that the bull's believed sexual potency could be transferred to the newlyweds" (8).[95] Casas Gaspar also argues that bullfighting was in its origin an agrarian ritual, which he describes as a fight between bulls that would inevitably conclude with a sacrifice when the victorious bull was carried in triumph by a singing and drumming crowd to the altar of the local agrarian saint, in whose honour it was sacrificed by a priest (225).[96] Casas Gaspar also mentions bullfighting *per se*, which originated in Creta and was celebrated, originally, in Esmira, Tesalia and Sinope in honour of Poseidon, who was agrarian deity (225); and, concerning the connection between bullfighting and fertility rituals in Spain, he quotes the eighteenth-century French clergyman José Branet who, in his work *Tudela en 1797*, explained that, when it rains after a bullfight, the rain is considered to be the intercession of the saint in whose honour the bullfight was celebrated (qt. in Casas Gaspar 229).[97]

This inextricable connection between bullfighting and the Catholic liturgy—arguably evolved from a connection between bullfighting and varied pagan fertility rites, as demonstrated by the varied anthropological sources that connect both rituals—is of course present in *The Sun Also Rises*. Jake clarifies that "there were many people at the eleven o'clock Mass [because] San Fermin is also a religious festival" (Hemingway 132); and thus the novel, besides bullfighting, also depicts religious processions and pagan parades that take place during the San Fermin festivities and that are also connected to fertility rites.[98] The connection between these religious ceremonies and

[94] According to Álvarez de Miranda, the oldest record of bullfighting in Spain is of an aristocratic wedding held in 1080. He explains: "la noticia más antigua que existe sobre corridas de toros es del año 1080. Tuvo lugar en Ávila, con la ocasión de la aristocrática boda del infante Sancho de Estrada con la noble doña Urraca Flores" (98-9).

[95] A ritual of this kind is included in Alfonso X, the Wise's (1221–1284) *Cantigas de Santa Maria*; specifically in the *Cantiga* 144: "Ond 'un cavaleiro ben d'i casou / Da vila, e touros trager mandou / Pera sas vodas" (123). These rituals persist until at least four centuries later, as demonstrated by Lope de Vega's famous play *Peribañez y el Comendador de Ocaña* (written in between 1604 and 1613). This *comedia* begins with Peribañez and Casilda's nuptial celebrations, in which the peasants festively fight young bulls. One of these young bulls will harm the knight commander, unleasing the tragic events dramatized in the play.

[96] "El toro vencedor es conducido triunfalmente entre canciones y tamboriles hasta la divinidad del campo en cuyo honor le sacrifica un sacerdote" (225). Bearing this ceremony in mind, one may recall Backman's myth-critical identifcation of Romero with a "warrior-priest" (see 87 in this chapter, p. 271).

[97] "Si llueve después de la corrida se atribuye a la intercesión del santo, en nombre del cual se ha celebrado" (qt. Casas Gaspar 229).

[98] Casas Gaspar explains that Christian peasants have faith in religious processions and believe that when the statues of the saints are taken to the barren fields, they earn the saints' active and beneficial compassion. He writes: "En los pueblos cristianos, los campesinos tienen puesta su fe en las procesiones, y creen que sacando las imágenes sagradas al campo para que ellas vean su desolador aspecto, se gana su

bullfighting is inextricable, as one never takes place without the other; and the connection, in origin, between bullfighting and Catholic liturgy with ancient pagan fertility rites, as argued, seems to substantiate Mitchell's argument that, in the decades of 1920 and 1930, Spanish intellectuals more or less unanimously considered that "the bullfight was linked to the sacrifices primitive peoples had made to their divinities" (Mitchell 295).

And yet, once established the ultimately regenerative teleology of the bullfight rituals—that is, to transfer the bull's presumed fecundity to the land, the cattle, or in origin to a newlywed couple—one must also take into consideration that the biggest interest in contemporary bullfighting does not reside in the completion of the sacrifice, but on the bullfighter's dexterity, which is usually measured in aesthetic terms.[99] This notion is especially relevant because *The Sun Also Rises* does focus on the sacrificial killing of the bull, so much so that the very detailed description of the rite of sacrifice is not only the climactic point of the fiesta, but also of the text as a whole. So arguably, the moment of the sacrifice may contain and signify the set of meanings articulated in the narrative, and thus, the anthropological—but also symbolic, on a textual level—connection between the bullfight and the generative potency of sexual intercourse cannot be elided from a myth-ritualistic interpretation of Hemingway's text. For, as Carrie Douglass explains, in *The Sun Also Rises*, "the final act of the bullfight underscores the sexual roles of the two protagonists in the ring (…) The torero often encourages the bull into its charge with a sexual taunt, inciting the animal with pelvic thrusts, his genitals sculpted by his body-clinging trousers" (253). This association between bullfighting and sexual intercourse is inescapable when taking into consideration both the plot and the themes of the novel, and it becomes especially

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compasión activa y benéfica" (44). The processions thus function, ritually, as a sort of benign flood that fertilizes the land as the men carry the statue of the saint on their shoulders as if it were a boat carried by the 'river' of men: "…una riada humana, y sobre los hombros de los devotos, que se disputan tamaño honor, con andar de remos, boga la imagen santa como si fuera en barca y el campo estuviera anegado de agua como lo está de gentío. Tras de recorrer un largo circuito, el río humano, fragoroso de rezos, desemboca en la iglesia, la desborda y se remansa a la puerta, y todos llevan colgaduras de alborozo en el corazón y una esperanza renaciente en que llueva" (44-5).

In *The Sun Also Rises*, giants are shown parading during the *riau-riau*, a pagan dance that constitutes a magical and religious choreography that benefits the harvest (Casas Gaspar 146)—"una coreografía mágico-religiosa [que] redunda en beneficio de la cosecha" (Casas Gaspar 146). The *Riau-riau* can indeed be interpreted as a kind of collective agrarian dance that is believed to function as a magical turbine that generates energy and hence guarantees the prosperity of the land and cattle. As Caspar Casas writes, "estos bailes en masa (…) han sido en los pueblos agrícolas primitivos algo así como las turbinas generadoras de fuerza mágica aplicada en la intención al fomento de la vida vegetal y ganadera" (Casas Gaspar 148).

[99] See, e.g, Patricia Hetter's "The Aesthetics of the Fiesta de los Toros."

meaningful when considered under the critical prism of Álvarez de Miranda's hypothesis that what the bullfight realizes, in ritualistic terms, is the bull's transformation into a cow, which, bleeding, is penetrated and dominated in a ceremonial ritual of fecundity.[100] In turn, the bullfighter acquires the bull's transferred virility (Álvarez de Miranda 69), effectively completing an exchange of genders and sexual roles that is key to interpreting, in mythical terms, the sexual dynamics that articulate Brett's relationships with the male characters of the novel. But before that symbolic correlation can be solidly established, it is necessary to examine the symbolic mechanisms that operate in that ritual interchange of sexual roles as described by de Miranda; that is to say, it is necessary to consider the instruments that, according to Miranda, penetrate, subjugate and ultimately sacrifice the bull. Evidently, these instruments—which posses both a ritualistic and a mythical meaning—are the lance and the rapier; that is to say, the spear and the sword.

The lance (or spear) and the sword are two of the main symbols of the Grail legend, along with the cup, the stone and the dish,[101] which Weston interprets as "sex symbols of immemorial antiquity and world-wide diffusion (…) forming part of a ritual dealing with the processes of life and reproductive vitality" (75). In the earliest extant version of the myth, the Fisher King was wounded with a javelin, that is, a sort of spear, during the course of a battle.[102] Thus the Fisher King's castrating wound resonates in two different elements of *The Sun Also Rises*. Firstly, the Fisher King's wound echoes in Jake's battle injury; but also, insofar as the mythical king's wound is inflicted by the symbolic lance, and thus contains a primitive, ritualistic meaning associated with the cyclical life of vegetation, the Fisher King's injury may also be linked to the wounds inflicted on the bull during the bullfight. This notion unequivocally reinforces the anthropological hypothesis that the bullfight functions as a sort of emasculation ritual, which in turn characterizes the emasculated bull as a correlative of Jake himself. However, the symbolic structure of the novel seems to insist on identifying the fighting bull with Brett, which generates an apparent contradiction that might not be a true contradiction after all. Because, perhaps, Jake's impotence and Brett's debatable (and 'manlike') promiscuity are not different afflictions, but two distinct (symbolic)

[100] Álvarez de Miranda draws this hypothesis from a comparative study of varied Spanish myths that narrate the metamorphosis of a bull becoming a cow (pp. 60 and ff.).
[101] See Weston, chapter VI: "The Symbols" (pp. 65-80).
[102] Eloquently, once the myth is overtly Christianized in later medieval retellings, the Maimed King is told to have been wounded by Longinus's spear (see p. 14). The symbol of the lance thus recurs in all medieval versions of the myth, regardless of the circumstances surrounding the Maimed King's injury.

manifestations of the same pathology, which is the same existential disease that affects all who have survived the war.

BULLS HAVE NO BALLS

In the Spanish tradition, as Mitchell explains, "both men and women can and do picture themselves as the bullfighter and the opposite sex as the bull (...) For every metaphor that pictures the woman as a wild creature who must be dominated and penetrated with a long instrument there is another that pictures the man as a gullible patsy whose blind charges are easily governed by woman" (399-400). Indeed, both notions seem to characterize Brett. She is "wild," yet dominates effortlessly the men who mindlessly pursue her. These are thus easily defined as "gullible patsies," as Brett—"the woman as a wild creature"—positions herself at the head of every power dynamic that articulates social relationships among the group of characters who travel from Paris to Pamplona to enjoy the San Fermin fiesta. Around Brett, all men behave as steers, that is, as castrated bulls, while she charges and gores. Yet ultimately she cannot be penetrated and dominated as the fighting bull is supposed to be, which determines that the identification between Brett and the bull brings about, catastrophically, the ineluctable (and misogynistic) failure of the regenerative ritual performed through the bullfight.

Brett is a "bad woman," according to the categories established by Carol H. Smith to classify Hemingway's female characters. She writes: "Good women fix their love on one man and support him. Bad women use their sexual power to tempt men and to disrupt the often fragile stability of the male world, where violence seethes just bellow the surface" (130). Brett is certainly 'bad'. From Robert Cohn's perspective, she is straightforwardly a sadist. Mike, her latest fiancé, defends her by arguing that she is simply healthy: "'He[=Cohn] said Brett was a sadist,' Mike said. 'Brett's not a sadist. She's just a lovely, healthy wench.' (…) 'He said Brett was a sadist just because she has a good, healthy stomach'" (Hemingway 144). Immediately, Jake's retort is devastating: "Won't be healthy long" (144). This ominous prediction is a comment on the Absinthe that Brett, along with the men, is drinking compulsively during the scene. Yet in the context, it is quite meaningful how Brett's health is identified with a dauntless instinct of cruelty that makes her take pleasure from the bloody spectacle of the bull goring the

horse during the bullfight: "'They do have some rather awful things happen to them,' Brett said. 'I couldn't look away, though'" (143). Unlike Brett, Robert Cohn gets sick during the bullfight. Mike mocks him and taunts him relentlessly: "Is Robert Cohn going to follow Brett around like to steer all the time?" (123).

Mike's mocking words are clearly rather eloquent, but more so insofar as they follow the *encierro* during which a fighting bull gores a steer. Brett watches, enthralled by the violence: "'My God, isn't he beautiful?'"(121). Jake explains: "'He's got a left and a right just like a boxer'" (121). From that moment, unquestionably, the reader cannot but perceive the charging bull goring the steer as a sort of boxing fight, recalling in effect the well-known first line of the novel: "Robert Cohn was once middleweight boxing champion of Princeton" (3). The fight during the *encierro* is thus configured as the correlative of Cohn's situation. The fight is described: "The steer was down now, his neck stretched out, his head twisted, he lay the way he had fallen. Suddenly the bull left off and made for the other steer which had been standing at the far end, his head swinging, watching it all. The steer ran awkwardly and the bull caught him, hooked him lightly in the flank, and then turned away and looked up at the crowd on the walls, his crest of muscle rising" (122). After the bull gores one steer, it instinctively charges another. Brett operates much in the same way, as Mike reminds to Cohn: "What if Brett did sleep with you? She's slept with lots of better people than you." (123). But Cohn "can't believe it didn't mean anything" (157). He refuses to see himself as a steer, repeatedly charged and gored by the bull. "It's no life being a steer" (123), he complains.

Contrarily, Mike—who all throughout the fiesta repeats time and again that "bulls have no balls" (152)—and especially Bill and Jake, do accept their emasculation, in spite of the pain and frustration it causes them to live like steers. After returning from Burguete, Bill tells Mike that "[it] must be swell being a steer" (116). The statement is rooted in a deeply meaningful conversation that Bill and Jake had in Burguete, in which Bill—a sort of cynical Jimmy Herf who, instead of futilely trying to run away (only to always come back), has resigned himself to live in New York and travel to Europe only occasionally—explains to Jake how the American expatriates are perceived by those who have remained in the United States:

> You're an expatriate. You've lost touch with the soil. You get precious. Fake European standards have ruined you. You drink yourself to death. You become

> obsessed by sex. You spend all your time talking, not working. You are an expatriate, see? You hang around cafes (...) You don't work. One group claims women support you. Another group claims you're impotent. (100-1).

Bill's words may be attributed not only to Jake, but also to the rest of expatriate characters depicted in the novel. Thus Bill's perception seems to coincide with Georgette's, as it establishes that one of the defining traits of the expatriate is a sexual deficiency. His subsequent comment—"I'm fonder of you than anybody on Earth. I couldn't tell you that in New York. It'd mean I was a faggot" (101)—insists on connoting a generalized—in New York and *outside of* New York, this time—condition that is made manifest in an ever-present, all-consuming sexuality that is however, in all cases, catastrophically barren.[103] Because men are steers and (bad) women are bulls and this inversion of sexual forces cannot be undone through the regenerative ritual of the bullfight, which should have ensured the restoration of fecundity and the rebirth of the life in the Waste Land, and yet it is shown in the novel to be nothing but an exercise in futility.

Such notion is also demonstrated by the pointless death of Girones, a runner killed during the fiesta. The echoes of the previously quoted fight between the bull and the steer resonate in the description of Girones's death: "one [bull] shot ahead, caught a man in the running crowd in the back and lifted him in the air. Both the man's arms were by his sides, his head went back as the horn went in, and the bull lifted him and then dropped him. The bull picked another man running in front (…) The man who had been gored lay face down in the tramped mud" (170). The image of Girones lying face down recalls a similar image depicted only a few paragraphs above: "Cohn was lying, face down, on the bed in the dark (...) Cohn was crying. There he was, face down on the bed, crying" (167-8). Brett, who has chosen to seduce the young bullfighter Romero, has gored Cohn; the text hence establishes a parallel between Girones and Cohn, lying face down after the bull has gored them. Yet this parallelism can in fact be extended to every other male character in the novel for, as seen, they are all steers, repeatedly charged and gored by the bull that they are futilely trying to enclose in the cattle pen.

[103] Following Pernick, Fore explains: "…the characterization makes sense if one scratches the surface of the word to reveal the homonym beneath—'ex-patriot,' a euphemism for a discharged soldier. This hidden concept exposes the wound-related anxiety here, because Jake's mutilated penis is the reason he has become an 'ex-patriot' and an impotent *expatriate*. All the flaws ascribed to this decadent character—alcoholism, laziness, unemployment, sexual obsessiveness, and dependence on women—are also weaknesses stereotypically ascribed to wounded men whose injuries have supposedly destroyed all positive aspects of their former personalities" (84-85).

Thus, as Rovit and Brenner have argued, Girones's death does not simply stand in as a symbolic significant of the generalized sickness that affects "everybody," but in fact, Girones's death may be interpreted to symbolize a state of 'life in death' that, as in previously analyzed texts, seems to define the existence of all who are trapped in the Waste Land. As they argue, "Girones is tossed and gored" (135) like Cohn, and thus, Girones's death, which seems to characterize the life of all the steers, "is the physical fact of [the characters'] living deaths, and their inability to respond to it establishes clearly to what extent they have died" (135). Edmund Wilson concurs, even though he interprets their 'living death' as a sort of irreversible moral collapse:

> The casualties of the bullfight at Pamplona, to which these young people have gone for the *fiesta*, only reflect the blows and betrayals of demoralized human beings out of hand. What is the tiresome lover with whom the lady has just been off on to casual escapade, and who is unable to understand that he has been discarded, but the man who, on his way to the bull ring, has been accidentally gored by the bull? ("Hemingway" 19)

A SPECTACLE OF DECADENCE

Evidently, "the tiresome lover with whom the lady has just been off on to casual escapade" is not just Cohn; it is every men trying to harness and steer Brett. But even more terribly, that casual lover may ultimately be identified with the bullfighter Romero, a circumstance that determines the failure of the ritual of regeneration depicted—and frustrated—in the novel. In spite of Mike's words, Brett is not healthy. On the contrary, the reason why she and Mike do not join Bill and Jake during their fishing trip is that Brett falls ill. Brett, after all, is also a victim of the First World War. As Spilka explains, she "survives the colossal violence, the disruption of her personal life, and the exposure to mass promiscuity, to confront a moral and emotional vacuum among her postwar lovers" (110-101). She does partake in the collective sickness, but also functions as a source of infection in her environment; according to Sanderson, "the novel offers, as a contrast to decadent Paris, two sites of primitive purity. The first is Burguete in the Spanish mountains. Jake and Bill make an idyllic fishing expedition there, which Brett, notably, fails to join. The second is the world of bullfighting, which Brett corrupts" (179). Sanderson refers to Brett's seduction of Romero who, until he

meets Brett, was the only bullfighter that seemed to escape "the decadence of bullfighting" (Hemingway 187). Jake explains to Brett:

> [S]ince the death of Joselito all the bullfighters had been developing a technique that simulated this appearance of danger in order to give a fake emotional feeling, while the bullfighter was very safe. Romero had the old thing, the holding of his purity of line through the maximum of exposure, while he dominated the bull by making him realize he was unattainable, while he have prepared him for the killing. (146)

And yet, in spite of his dexterity in the bullfight ring, Romero cannot dominate Brett any better than any of the steer-characters. Romero is not unattainable for Brett. The description of his bullfighting is very eloquent in this regard. Jake observes:

> At the end of the pass they were facing each other again. Romero smiled. The bull wanted it again, and Romero's cape filled again, this time on the other side. Each time he let the bull pass so close that the man and the bull and the cape that filled and pivoted ahead of the bull were all one sharply etched mass. (…) Romero had to make the bull consent with his body. He had to get so close that the bull saw his body, and would start for it, and then shift the bull's charge to the flannel and finish out the pass in the classic manner. (188-189)

The sexual undertones of the description allow for establishing a parallelism between Romero's bullfight and his relationship with Brett. During the successful bullfight, "the sword went in, and for just an instant he and the bull were one" (189-190). This is where the parallelism dissolves. Brett seduces Romero, but their sexual relationship does not bring about the interchange of sexual roles carried out ritualistically during the bullfight. The bull—Brett—is not dominated; she does not become a cow.[104] Her masculine sexual role is not reverted, and thus the gender-based mythopoeia that establishes that only the restoration of natural(ized) sexual roles can bring about the regeneration of life in the Waste Land is represented as frustrated and ultimately futile.[105] Brett corrupts Romero, which signifies the bull wining over the

[104] At the end of the novel Brett leaves Romero because, as she complains to Jake: "He was ashamed of me (…) He wanted me to grow my hair out (…) He said it would make me more womanly (…) He wanted to marry me (…) He wanted to make it sure I could never go away from him. After I'd gotten more womanly, of course" (212).

[105] As explained in a later chapter, Djuna Barnes's 'wasteland novel' *Nightwood* (1937) exposes the misogyny of such mythopoeia and reveals that the supposed longing of modernists texts such as those explored in the third part of this study for the restoration of myth in fact endorses and perpetuates the ideological misogyny inherent to the masculinist myth of the Waste Land, which, as explored in depth throughout this study, functions as the narrative and cultural counterpart of a dominant and conservative

bullfighter; that is to say, the complete failure of the rite of sacrifice. Spilka goes as far as arguing that Romero being corrupted by Brett "strip[s] the whole fiesta of significance" (116). He offers her as a present the ear of the bull that killed Girones, but any meaning that such ritual offering might have entailed is annulled when she leaves the ear, along with a pack of Muratti cigarettes, at the bottom of a drawer in the Montoya hotel. Spilka explains: "For the crowd, the death of this bull was a communal triumph and his ear a token of communal strength (…) In effect, [Brett] has robbed the community of its triumph, as she will now rob it of its hero" (116). Thus Brett arguably functions as a sort of pathogenic influence that aggravates the condition that afflicts the (mostly male) community, which could have only been saved through the successful ritual of regeneration carried out by the bullfight. Brett's actions frustrate the ritual; as Spilka argues, "these are decadent times in the bull ring, marred by false aesthetics; Romero alone has 'the old thing,' (…): his corruption by Brett will complete the decadence" (Spilka 116).

Bullfighting, with the sole exception of Romero, has lost its ritualistic force in the contemporary world. It has become not only a vain spectacle, but in fact a spectacle of decadence. This becomes explicit in the novel's representation of Juan Belmonte, the most famous and appreciated bullfighter in history, but portrayed in Hemingway's text as being as sick as the community. His bullfighting is described as follows:

> Always the pain that any movement produced grew stronger and stronger, until finally his yellow face was parchment colour, and after his second bull was dead and the throwing of bread and cushions was over, after he had saluted the President with the same wolf-jawed smile and contemptuous eyes, and handed his sword over the *barrera* to be wiped, and put back in its case, he passed through into the *callejón* and leaned on the *barrera* bellow us, his head on his arms, not seeing, not hearing anything, only going through his pain. (186)

Belmonte's performance, while being "sick with a fistula" (186), is neither heroic nor sublime. It is simply the spectacle of a man's sickness. He had been an idol for the people, yet the reason why the spectators "had stayed in line all night to buy tickets to see him" (185) during the fiesta in Pamplona was that "he gave the sensation of coming

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discourse of power that is challenged and undermined in varied ways throughout the literary tradition in English. As Onderdonk explains, "in Hemingway's version of this representational war, women have the power to feminize men even when they are themselves disempowered, a construction that shifts the focus from women's collective grievances to individual male ones" (76). Women are thus represented as the signifier of male suffering which effectively "erase[s] the structural causes of female suffering almost completely" (76).

tragedy" (185). Jake elaborates: "People went to the *corrida* to see Belmonte, to be given tragic sensations, and perhaps to see the death of Belmonte" (185). He was (also historically) a sort of legendary hero—"when he retired the legend grew up about how his bullfighting had been" (185-6)—yet *The Sun Also Rises* focuses on the portrayal of his sickness and decay. He thus becomes indistinguishable from the diseased community he is a part of; his incapacity to complete the bullfighting ritual signifies his emasculation, and thus bullfighters as a whole—with the sole (and fleeing) exception of Romero—are portrayed as being as 'impotent' as the rest of the characters. Bullfighters are also steers, then; they also partake in the sickness that afflicts all who live in the Waste Land. This circumstance is catastrophic, because it means that the bullfighters have lost the mystical energy that should have made them capable of bringing about the restoration of the land.[106]

THE EARTH ABIDETH FOREVER

As Mitchell explains: "the fact that this traditional temporal craft [=bullfighting] is executed in public, with the performers dressed in a specified way and following the same specific routines, makes the bullfight *seem* a ritual. But the insiders—*cuadrillas*, aficionados, critics—do not attribute any sort of symbolic meaning to their actions" (Mitchell 401). That is to say, bullfighting in truth reproduces the structure of a ritual, but it is not a true ritual in the contemporary world. Present-day bullfighting is not perceived as mystical in any way; it simply reproduces a ritualized performance—culminating in a sacrifice—that may reveal a truly ritualistic origin, but that is ultimately a mere aesthetic representation. As such it is certainly depicted in *The Sun Also* Rises, most eloquently in how the novel itself reproduces the same ritualistic—yet vain—structure of the bullfight:

[106] As already mentioned, Backman argues that Romero represents a sort of "priest-warrior" tasked with the mission of conducting the life rites that should regenerate the Waste Land. Perhaps, insofar as Romero is characterized as the only character who (temporarily) escapes the all-pervading corruption of the community, and who is (fleetingly) in a position to in fact restore the Waste Land, it can also be argued that Romero stands in a sort of failed Grail-Knight figure who—like Jimmy Herf or Jay Gatsby—cannot truly succeed in his mission because the Waste Land of the contemporary post-war world is in fact irredeemable, and the collective sickness that affects the whole of the community cannot ever be relieved.

> Book 1 is 'the trial of the lances,' Jake painfully 'pic-ed' by the barbs of his unresignable desire for a free expression of his natural wants; Book 2, the act of the banderillas at Pamplona, goads him beyond endurance into jealousy and self-betrayal; and Book 3, the final division of death, is the brave administering of quietus to that part of his life desire that he must learn to live without if he is to live at all. (Rovit and Brenner 139)

This hypothesis reinforces the notion that the novel is structured along the pattern of a failed ritual, as it argues that Jake's ultimate aspiration is to live without the vital impulses that, inasmuch as they can never be satisfied, constitute an unbearable burden for him. Jack is a Fisher-King figure that cannot ever be healed because, as Lupack and Lupack argue, "in Hemingway's land of waste, the altar is a bar, the Grail a glass of absinthe" (161). The ritual fails; the Waste Land cannot be restored to its fertility. The post-war generation portrayed in the novel cannot thus but remain irreparably—physically and spiritually—sick, impotent, and sterile. The novel opens with an epigraph, the second part of which is the very famous quote attributed to the poet Gertrude Stein, "You are all a lost generation." Usually, the already-mentioned 'lost generation'[107] is a term applied to a group of expatriate American authors who lived in Europe after the First World War, where they wrote some of the major works of the American literary canon in the decade of 1920. Malcom Cowley explains:

> The Paris of young American writers in the early and middle 1920s was both a city and a state of feeling induced, as I have already suggested, by the Great War and its aftermath. Like Hemingway, most of the writers had been in uniform and—with exceptions such as Fitzgerald and Faulkner—had served on the French or the Italian front. They had learned to admire French culture and had dreamed of a better world after the war. When they went back to the States, they found that the postwar world was worse for them than the world they had known before 1917. Prohibition, Puritanism, philistinism, and salesmanship: these seemed to be the triumphant causes in America. Whoever had won the war, young American writers came to regard themselves as a defeated nation. (Cowley *Flowering* 53)

Yet in the context of *The Sun Also Rises*, the term 'lost generation' may in fact be expanded so that it encompasses the entire generation of war survivors who are arguably represented by the characters of the novel. In this sense, Cowley writes:

> The final effect on us of the war[] was the honest emotion behind a pretentious phrase like 'the lost generation.' School and college had uprooted us in spirit;

[107] See note 39 to chapter 8, p. 218.

> wow we were *physically uprooted*, hundred of us, millions, *plucked from our own soil* as if by a clamshell bucket and dumped, scattered among strange people. *All our roots were dead* now, even the Anglo-Saxon tradition of our literary ancestors, even the habits of slow thrift that characterized our social class. We were fed, lodged, clothed by strangers, commanded by strangers, *infected* with the poison of irresponsibility—the poison of travel, too, for we had learned that problems could be left behind us merely by moving elsewhere—and the poison of danger, excitement, that made our old life seems intolerable. (*Exile* 46, my italics)[108]

Cowley's explanation seems to validate the notion that *The Sun Also Rises* truly constitutes a faithful depiction of the lifestyle of American expatriates after the First World War. Cowley's description of the 'lost generation' is reminiscent of Bill's characterization of the expatriate. Cowley insists: "when we first heard of the Armistice we felt a sense of relief too deep to express, and we all got drunk. We had come through, we were still alive, and nobody at all would be killed tomorrow. (...) On the next day, after we got over our hangovers, we didn't know what to do, so we got drunk" (Cowley *Exile* 46-7). The relationship of correlation between Cowley's description of the 'lost generation' and the scenes and characters of *The Sun Also Rises* seems evident; and yet, Hemingway's novel is far from being solely a narrative that realistically portrays the hedonistic, self-destructive lifestyle of this 'lost generation.' As explored throughout this chapter, *The Sun Also Rises* presents a deeply symbolic and mythical narrative that transcends the boundaries of social representation. Geismar argues:

> We see, in fact, that the lost generation is, in the end, much more than lost (...) Hemingway's post-war generation is frustrate with an intensity and cunning of purpose, with a natural and unconscious knowledge of the best methods to defeat itself, with an almost diabolical sense of frustration. If these people are meant to be representative, they must derive not merely from a disorganized society but from, so to speak, an entire genealogy of ancestors, from frustrated to race of disillusioned. (53)

Geismar recalls the notion of an ancestral genealogy of frustration, of which the characters in the novel would be representatives. This hypothesis is cognate with the argument advanced in this chapter: the hypothesis that the frustration that defines life in the world of *The Sun Also Rises* is mythical rather than historical. The characters, with no hopes of ever being restored to a wholesome existence, can only endure resiliently

[108] Indeed, as seen in the previous chapter, this 'lost generation' had "grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken" (Fitzgerald; *Paradise* 213).

their lifeless, degenerate existence in the Waste Land. Men can only prove their worth through their "stoic capacity to endure pain and confront death" (Backman 115). But such stoic capacity results in the hero's isolation, which is, as described, a common trope in the modernist novels analyzed in the third part of this study. In Hemingway's novel, however, the hero is not only isolated from the rest of the community; he becomes isolated from life itself. Jack admits: "All I wanted to know was how to live in it" (Hemingway 129). Significantly, there is no anaphoric reference in the text that allows for the elucidation of what 'it' may mean. 'It' acquires thus a multiplicity of references. *It* means the world; but also the pain and suffering that living 'life-in-death' entails for the characters. Jake wants to live in *it*; but like Ellen Thatcher, Jack Barnes learns throughout the course of the narrative that to live in *it* means not to live at all. It means accepting lifelessness as a form of life. In the case of Jake, it means numbing his consciousness with alcohol and aesthetic pleasures obtained through the inactive contemplation of the barren rituals that have become mere spectacles of vanity and decay in the contemporary world.[109]

T. S. Eliot defined stoicism as "the refuge for the individual in an indifferent or hostile world too big for him; it is the permanent substratum of a number of versions of cheering oneself up" ("Stoicism" 131-132). Jake's stoicism replaces action with the contemplative (and intoxicated) endurance of rituals that have lost their mysticism and are thus performed as vain spectacles. He must then confront, constantly, the impossibility of regeneration. The second part of the novel's epigraph is a quote from the Ecclesiastes:

> One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth forever… The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and then hasteth

[109] As it pertains to a myth-critical study, this chapter has focused on examining the vanity of the bullfighting ritual as depicted in the novel. However, it may be useful to also consider the vanity of religious rituals—inextricably associated to the pagan ritual of the bullfight, as argued—famously emblematized in the scene in which Jake goes into the cathedral, tries to pray and instead gets lost in his thoughts: "…all the time I was kneeling with forehead on the wood in front of me, and was thinking of myself as praying, I was a little ashamed, and regretted that I was such a rotten Catholic, but realized there was nothing I could do about it, at least for a while, and maybe never, but that anyway it was a grand religion, and I only wished I felt religious and maybe I would the next time; and then I out in the hot sun on the steps of the cathedra, and the forefinger and the thumb of my right hand were still damp, and I felt them dry in the sun" (Hemingway 85).
The scene very clearly dramatizes the vanity of ritual. Jake kneels and crosses himself, but only thinks of himself as praying, and does not feel religious at all. Even more eloquently, perhaps, Jake's last ritual gesture of crossing himself is elided and replaced with a semicolon, the punctuation mark that juxtaposes two scenes by creating a moment of silence in between them. The ritual is thus literally effaced, and yet banally performed.

> to the place where he arose… The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits… All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full, unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again. (qt. in Hemingway n.p.).

The quote, which gives title to the novel, opposes the eternally recurrent cyclical movement of the seasons—which is always regenerative—to the somehow also cyclical but actually degenerative movement of the characters, who are thus portrayed as a stagnant generation trapped motionless in the cyclical turn of the natural world. As in the first lines of *The Waste Land*, the epigraphs of *The Sun Also Rises* oppose the eternally regenerative time of nature to the lifeless existence of those who are condemned to forever linger in the unredeemable Waste Land. The physical restoration of the natural world can no longer bring about the spiritual rehabilitation of the sick, increasingly lifeless individuals portrayed in the text. The characters end up in Madrid in a very similar situation to how they began in Paris: Jake and Brett, together in taxi, as sick and frustrated as they were at the beginning of the novel. They no longer hope for any chance of restoration. In Paris, Jake wonders out loud: "Isn't there anything we can do about it?" (Hemingway 22). He answers himself: "There's not a damn thing we could do" (23). In Madrid, Jake and Brett can only resign themselves to a state of degeneration that is overwhelming and irreparable, and cannot be escaped: "'we could have had such a dammed good time together.' (…) 'Yes,' I said. 'Isn't it pretty to think so?'" (216).

PART IV
THE HOLY GRAIL

REPRESENTATION AND REINTERPRETATION OF THE WASTE LAND MYTH IN AMERICAN LITERATURE AFTER MODERNISM

CHAPTER 11

THE WASTE LAND OF THE WEST: JOHN STEINBECK'S *TO A GOD UNKNOWN*

A MYSTICAL TRAGEDY

Most of John Steinbeck's major works—*The Pastures of Heaven* (1932), *The Grapes or Wrath* (1939), or *East of Eden* (1952) are good examples of this—give account of a remarkably well-known use of traditional myths that refuses to take for granted the "sense of 'naturalness' that corresponds to the version of reality promoted by accepted myths and masterplots" (Pugh 74). In order to challenge the unquestioning acceptance of traditional myths as *natural* narratives, Steinbeck's major works often reinterpret myth by combining divergent mythic templates, for example juxtaposing in one single narrative divergent tropes from the Old and New Testaments in *The Grapes of Wrath* (the Flood, the Exodus, and Jesus Christ's Sacrifice), or, as another instance, reconciling the Exile of Eden, the Parable of the Prodigal Son, and pagan esoteric myths in *East of Eden* (Pugh 74). In *To a God Unknown* (1933), however, the process of mythical representation is a little more straightforward, and it in fact overlaps squarely with the literary tradition so far explored in this study.

As one of the earliest novels published by John Steinbeck, *To a God Unknown*—the story of a man who moves to California to establish a homestead and, after a terrible drought, sacrifices his own life to ensure the prosperity of his land—gives account of a

particular view of American life characterized by a "closeness" (French 51) to the extremely pessimistic view expressed in the works of the "the Wasteland writers" (French 51) of the 1920s, from whom Steinbeck would later on become progressively separated, artistically speaking, as his career expanded in the following decades. *To a God Unknown*, however, defined by French as a "mystical tragedy" (179), is in this view regarded as "[a] product of a pervasive mentality of the Waste Land years of the 1920's" (Warren 170) and thus the aim of this chapter is to explore how such 'wasteland mentality' takes form in the novel and, especially, how it is transformed with regards to the reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth already analyzed in previous chapters. For, as this study examines, Steinbeck's text is significantly different from the novels explored in the third part of this dissertation, as it introduces the first instance of mythical ambivalence in the representation of the Fisher King and the Grail Knight as identifiable figures, and explicitly reinterprets, for the first time, the Grail as a mystical vehicle of death. Both cases of mythical representation constitute a subversion that continues the degenerative reinterpretation of the myth carried out unambiguously in the decade of 1920, and both cases are also characteristic traits in the representation of the Waste Land myth as it takes place in the decades following the 1920s and up to the postmodernist novels of the 1960s that will be examined in the following chapters. Nonetheless, initially, *To a God Unknown* seems so close to the ideological postulates of the 1920s 'wasteland novels' that it has often been considered almost indistinguishable from them. Connie Post summarizes:

> *To a God Unknown* is the story of *America turned wasteland* in the Depression era. The novel portrays Joseph Wayne's attempt to rejuvenate a *dying land that signifies the entire twentieth-century American landscape* (…) Joseph's land represents the desolation in America's social climate that was spreading throughout the land during the period in which Steinbeck wrote the novel. On a metaphorical level, his protagonist tries to alter an unfavorable social climate through his bringing about *a flood of remythologization*. (Post 8, my italics)

According to Post's argument, in a way reminiscent of Eliot's theorization on the concept of the 'mythical method',[1] the alternative to a convulsive social climate is seemingly found in myth, as if only mythologization—or "remythologization"—can

[1] See p. 192.

restore peace and order.[2] The restoration of myth as a structural device in narrative is identified with the flood that might bring about the rebirth of the dying land governed by Joseph, the novel's protagonist. Yet, taking into consideration the influence of the immediately precedent literary tradition, but also his personal contact with Joseph Campbell (to whom he read selections from his draft of *To a God Unknown* (Simkins 13)), Steinbeck seemingly arrived at the conclusion that "[the] modern need for myth (...) became not so much a search for a master narrative as for myth as a an *adaptive* narrative" (Simkins 13, my italics.) Myth, as demonstrated by tradition, cannot simply be restored; it has to be adapted. And thus, as Post argues, *To a God Unknown* actually develops the notion that humankind's account of myths is necessarily malleable and in constant evolution, because all narratives are in fact constructed by arranging a fixed set of disjointed images in different, changeable ways (Post 8). Not in vain, in one of the literal waste lands found in Eliot's poem—"where the sun beats, / And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief, / And the dry stone no sound of water" (Eliot *TWL*; 22-4)[3]—there are only "broken images" (*TWL* 21), which may be in fact identified with the disjointed images of the dismantled and successively reconstructed myth.

Significantly, the echoes of this Eliotian waste land of dead trees and dry stones, beaten by a ruthless sun, reverberate powerfully in the description of Joseph Wayne's ranch, where "a faint whining came from the earth, as though it protested against the intolerable sun" (Steinbeck 141). Joseph's land is green and extremely, perhaps exaggeratedly fertile, up until the great oak tree that is allegedly imbued by the spirit of Joseph's father dies bluntly and unexpectedly, thus annulling the regenerative principle supposedly embodied in it. From that moment on, the 'dead tree' that, as in Eliot, offers no shelter or relief, becomes the emblem of the land's barrenness, in consequence

[2] In what could be considered another theorization on the 'mythical method', Scott Pugh explains: "Another major influence on Steinbeck's narrative structuring in general and on closure in particular is his interest in mythic thinking. Probably any literary artist working in the 20th century would have felt the influence of James Frazer, Joseph Campbell, Jung, Joyce, Eliot, Pound and uncountable others who emphasized the role of myth in our comprehension of the world. At any rate, Steinbeck's early novel *To a God Unknown* undeniably deals with the mythic forces at work in the lives of ordinary modern people. Implicitly, this novel and other fictions show how human beings structure their worldviews according to narrative templates in the form of often-repeated stories. These 'myths' are seen not as mere dead letters from an ancient tradition, but rather as dynamic shapers of consciousness, more like what these days might be called a "master narrative" or a 'masterplot'" (73-4).

[3] "Son of man, / You cannot say, or guess, for you know only / A heap of broken images, where the sun beats, / And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief, / And the dry stone no sound of water" (Eliot *TWL*; 20-4).

reversing the expected metonymic process so that the dead tree is not the result of the drought, but the reason behind it:

> He walked back to the house and stood under his own tree. "I was afraid, sir," he said. Something in the air made me afraid." And as he stroked the bark, suddenly he felt cold and lonely. "This tree is dead," his mind cried. "There's no life in my tree." The sense of loss staggered him, and all the sorrow he should have felt when his father died rolled in on him. The black mountains surrounded him, and the cold grey sky and the unfriendly stars shut him down, and the land stretched out from the center where he stood. It was all hostile, not ready to attack but aloof and silent and cold. Joseph sat the foot of the tree, and not even the hard bark held any comfort for him. It was as hostile as the rest of the earth, as frigid and contemptuous as the corpse of a friend. (Steinbeck 118)

The literal wasting of Joseph's land starts with the death of his tree, where he believed the spirit of his father had revived. It ends—or rather, reaches its paroxysm—as the small stream that runs from beneath a rock—as it will be explained further on, the Grail—in Joseph's "holy" glade (Steinbeck 30) finally dries:

> The light had come secretly in, and the sky and the trees and the rock were grey. Joseph walked slowly across the glade and knelt by the litter stream.
> And the stream was gone. He sat quietly down and put his hand in the bed. The gravel was still damp, but no water moved out of the little cave anymore.
> Joseph was very tired. The wind howling around the grove and the salty drought were too much to fight. He thought. "Now it's over. I think I knew it would be." (Steinbeck 177-8)

In this terrible, climactic moment in which the very short paragraphs infuse the prose with a poetic rhythm, the novel presents a rock set upon the damp earth, a landscape where the undefeatable drought is signified not by the dry earth, but by the haunting absence of the sound of water.[4] The mystical, holy rock to which Joseph recurrently offers his sacrifice—and to which he will eventually sacrifice his own life—has become "the dry stone [that gives] no sound of water" (Eliot *TWL*; 24). The reader is transported amidst the "stony rubbish" (*TWL* 20) of Eliot's poem, where one can only know "a heap of broken images" (*TWL* 22). These "broken images" are arguably the four mythemes that make up the Waste Land myth (the blighted land, the maimed king, the knight, and the Grail), decomposed in a multitude of varying symbols that, in the case of *To a God Unknown*, are reassembled in a myth-ritualistic narrative heavily

[4] See p. 196.

influenced, as other modernist texts, by the already discussed ritualistic interpretations of myth of authors such as Jessie L. Weston and James G. Frazer.

As Robert Segal explains, Frazer's myth-ritualist theory has two stages (*Theorizing* 39). In a first stage of myth-ritualism, myths describe the life of the god of vegetation, and rituals are dramatic enactments of such myths that operate on the basis of homoeopathic magic; that is to say, practical magic that follows the principle that "like produces like" (Frazer 14). In this view, fertility rites observed by men in ancient civilizations were in fact the dramatic representations of the phenomena that they were trying to facilitate, "a familiar tenet of magic that you can produce any desired effect by merely imitating it" (Frazer 377). Thus, rituals are understood as means to control the god of vegetation and not to manipulate vegetation directly (Segal *Theorizing,* 39-40). Yet in the second stage of myth-ritualism, the figure of the divine king is introduced and, of course, it is this second stage that makes it possible to apply myth-ritualistic presuppositions to Arthurian Studies. For if in the first stage of myth-ritualism the tribal king had played the part of the god of vegetation during the celebration of homeopathic rites, in Frazer's second version of myth-ritualism the king is himself conceived as divine, since it is believed that the vegetation god resides in him. The regenerative ritual that results for this belief is, as it has already been explained, the sacrificial killing of the divine king which constitutes the ending of *To a God Unknown*. Joseph sacrifices himself, but whether such sacrifice entails the physical (and spiritual) regeneration of his land remains open for interpretation, because, in spite of what a the reader might initially suspect, the novel's representation of Frazerian magical and religious principles is not straightforward, but heavily mediated by the subversive reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth. For as it happened in, for example, Eliot's *The Waste Land*, the Frazerian elements in the literary text become in fact yet another series of textual signifiers that stand in for the mythical structure that they are believed to underlie; that is, the narrative sequence of the Waste Land myth.

AN INCARNATE HUMAN GOD

Steinbeck's novel opens with a scene of quasi-royal succession between a father and his son that, by describing a moment of genital contact between both characters, suggests a

transaction of sexual potency: "'Come to me, Joseph. Put your hand here—no, here. My father did it this way. A custom so old cannot be wrong. Now, leave your hand there!' He bowed his white head, "May the blessing of God and my blessing rest of this child'" (Steinbeck 3). Joseph's father "white head" indicates a succession very close to Frazerian principles, for the old 'king' is transferring the spirit within him to a vigorous successor. The fact that the scene focuses on the transference of sexual potency is indisputably Frazerian too, since as Frazer hypothesizes, "the fertility of men, of cattle, and of the crops is believed to depend sympathetically on the generative power of the king" (313). Indeed, this sympathetical identification between the king and his land, which is the basis of myth-ritualism and the mystical theorization of the Waste Land myth, is all-pervading in *To a God Unknown*: "His father and the new land were one," Joseph realizes (Steinbeck 5); and not much later he adds: "My father thinks he is almost a god. And he is" (11). Joseph's father is a kind of man-god, "a human being endowed with divine or supernatural powers" (Frazer 106); and so, after he anoints Joseph and dies, Joseph becomes a man-god himself. Moreover, as the scene of succession anticipated, the mystical relationship that binds Joseph to the land is described in sexual terms: "As he rode, Joseph became timid and yet eager, as a young man is who slips out to a rendezvous with a wise and beautiful woman. He was half-drugged and overwhelmed by the forest of Our Lady. There was a curious femaleness about the interlacing boughs and twigs, about the long green cavern cut by the river through the trees and the brilliant underbrush" (Steinbeck 4). This image of a "long green cavern," unrefined as it may be, eloquently establishes the tone of a series of increasingly sexualized descriptions[5] that culminate in a rather explicit (yet still a bit coarse and awkwardly written) fertilization:

> He stamped his feet into the soft earth. Then the exultance grew to be a sharp pain of desire that run through his body in a hot river. He flung himself face downward on the grass and pressed his cheek against the wet stems. His fingers gripped the wet grass and tore it out, and gripped again. His thighs beat heavily on the earth.
> The fury left him and he was cold and bewildered and frightened at himself. He sat up and wiped the mud from his lips and beard (…) He tried to remember exactly what had happened. For a moment the land had been his wife. 'I'll need a wife,' he said. 'It will be too lonely here without a wife.' (8)

[5] E.g., "As he looked into the valley, Joseph felt his body flushing with a hot fluid of love" (Steinbeck 7).

According to the principles of sympathetic magic, however, the divine king is not meant to *literally* fertilize the land. On the contrary, the divine king must be able to reproduce *his* kind, so that his reproductive capacity can be transferred—by the law of similarity (Frazer 12)—to the crops and cattle. Yet, in spite of the blatant identification of Joseph with Frazer's man-god king, and in spite of the insistent sexualisation of Joseph's connection with the land (at times so forced and awkward that the reader may suspect it to be, perhaps, an intentional parody), the rules of the homeopathic magic that supposedly sustain the sympathetic connection between the king and his land are significantly flouted, for Joseph is desperate to fertilize his land himself, but he is also incapable of reproducing his own kind:

> When he walked bareheaded through the fields, feeling the wind in his beard, his eyes smouldered with lust. All things about him, the soil, the cattle, and the people were fertile, and Joseph was the source, the root of their fertility; his was the motivating lust. He willed that all things about him must grow, grow quickly, conceived and multiply. The hopeless sin was barrenness, a sun intolerable and unforgivable. (Steinbeck 22)

The fact that Joseph intends to *will* things into happening surely facilitates his identification with a king. Yet ironically, such desire directly contravenes his function as *divine* king, for he cannot *will* the land and cattle to be fertile. He can only be the source of that fertility by means of action, and not desire: he must be fertile himself. His lust and passion are otherwise sterile, regardless of whether Joseph believes them to be the root of all fecundity in his land. As Post explains, "Joseph is preoccupied with the mystery of propagation throughout the course of the novel, but his thoughts are primarily concerned with the land's regeneration rather than his own generative desires" (62). Hence through scenes that apparently exacerbate the buoyant fertility of Joseph's land, the text is paradoxically highlighting the character's sexual impotence. For instance: "One day Joseph stood by the pasture fence, watching a bull with a cow. He beat his hands against the fence rail; a red light burned in his eyes. As Burton approached him from behind, Joseph whipped off his hat and flung it down and tore open the collar of his shirt. He shouted, 'Mount, you fool! She's ready. Mount now!'" (Steinbeck 22).[6]

[6] As explained in the previous chapter (see pp. 276-275), the choice of the bull as an emblem of fecundity is not incidental, and will recur in the novel.

Burton, Joseph's deeply religious brother, who believes Joseph's worshipping of trees and other outwardly pagan practices are blasphemous and dangerous, warns Joseph that he is behaving strangely, that people might think his interest in the bull's mounting might be personal, and that "the Scripture mentions such forbidden things" (23). Far from denying such accusations, however, Joseph admits to it: "They might say I felt like the bull. Well, I do, Burton. And if I could mount a cow and fertilize it, do you think I'd hesitate? (…) If feeling could put a cow with a calf, I could mount a hundred. (…) Everything on the land is reproducing. I am the only sterile thing. I need a wife" (23). Here the text states explicitly that Joseph is sterile, an asseveration that, in mythical terms, can only result in the wasting of the land. Joseph is a divine-king figure, and as such Rama describes him when she explains to Elizabeth, Joseph's wife, that "there are men born outside humanity (…) Joseph has strength beyond vision of shattering, he has the calm of mountains, and his emotion is as wild and fierce and sharp as the lightening and just as reasonless as far as I can see or know (…) You cannot think of Joseph dying. He is eternal. His father died, and it was not death" (Steinbeck 66). Joseph is eternal because, as an "incarnate human god" (Frazer 105), he embodies the divine spirit that will live on after his physical death, as it has lived before him, incarnated in his father and in the great oak tree that Joseph identifies with his father's spirit. In mythical terms, however, Joseph Wayne, insofar as he embodies the Frazerian divine king, must also stand in as the Fisher King of the Waste Land myth as it represented in Steinbeck's novel, so that in fact his sterility becomes fundamental for a myth-critical study of *To a God Unknown*.

Joseph's sterility, however, does not extend to his ranch until his wife Elizabeth dies, but that mystical phenomenon is in fact anticipated throughout their courtship and marriage. For example, when Joseph begins courting Elizabeth, who has a "preternatural knowledge" (Steinbeck 31) in her eyes, he finds her "tense to repel his attack upon her boundaried and fortified self" (42). Gradually, however, her reluctance starts to fade, and as her desire awakens, she finds out that those thoughts that she thought were "foul and loathsome like slugs" (42) are in fact "light and gay and holy" (42). Elizabeth, as Joseph, has fantasies of fecundity that crystallize in Madonna-like images of herself, in which she imagines herself nursing Joseph, holding her breast to his lips and "pouring the hot fluid of herself toward his lips" (43). In a narrative strategy that recurs all throughout the novel, the text raises expectations of life and fecundity, only to thwart them immediately afterwards. For Elizabeth's daydreams of holy

motherhood are interrupted by Benjy, Joseph's drunkard brother who "has the disease in his body" (43). Inebriated, one night he sings to Elizabeth in Spanish, and immediately she falls passionately in love with him. But that same night, she casts her love away through a self-harming act, and simultaneously makes the fatal decision to marry Joseph against her own desires.

The wedding is held almost a year later, in winter, in a "sombre boding ceremony" (47), and in a church that "had so often seen two ripe bodies die by the process of marriage that it seemed to celebrate a mystic double death with its ritual. Both Joseph and Elizabeth felt the sullenness of the sentence. 'You must endure,' said the church; and its music with as a sunless prophecy" (47). As already analyzed in previous chapters—most extensively in the study of Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer*—the connection between death and marriage is a major trait in the texts that reinterpret the Waste Land myth, for it signifies not simply the failure of a fertility rite—i.e. the wedding—but also its perversion, as weddings are represented not solely as vain rituals that fail in their teleological purpose of ensuring fecundity, but as rites that result in an irreparable state of death in life. Weddings are a "sunless prophecy" and marriage a "sentence" that must be endured. That is the literal representation of the ritual that should have ensured Joseph's reproductive capacity and, consequently, the fertility of his land.

Before the wedding, Joseph takes Elizabeth to sit on his oak tree, "in the crotch from which the great limbs grew" (46). After the wedding, the consummation is replaced by a mystical crossing of a mountain, through a narrow split in the rock. Elizabeth is afraid to cross, but Joseph insists that the crossing is their true marriage, "entering the passage like sperm and egg that have become a single unit of pregnancy" (52). At the other side, however, nothing feels different for Elizabeth, who is left there crying after Joseph is gone. And so, once more, regardless of the sexual connotations of the scene, the novel presents a ritual of fertility, a true marriage, and frustrates the reader's expectations of fecundity by revealing it a failure. Once again, not incidentally, Joseph is replacing his own generative power—actual intercourse with Elizabeth—with a symbolic ceremony by means of which he literally (and uselessly) tries to fertilize the land, "entering the passage like sperm" (52).

THE UNHOLY GRAIL

Here resides a key aspect in the interpretation of Joseph Wayne as a Fisher-King figure. He's supposedly presented as a true divine king, yet instead of being presented with offerings and sacrifices, he is the one killing and offering calves to the oak tree, and, later, offering his own first-born child (who Joseph does not kill, but sends away, interrupting the process of divine succession definitely). As a man-god, Joseph's depiction is ambivalent. Even before Elizabeth's death, the rotting of the oak tree, and the wasting of Wayne Ranch, death and decay pervade even the scenes of (apparently) most-fulfilling plenitude. As he marches through his land for the first time, Joseph observes that "all over the valley the flimsy little clouds were forming and ascending like the spirits of the dead rising out of a sleeping city" (6) and, later, he recognizes that, "since I have come, since the first day, I have known that this is full of ghosts" (17). Despite his intimate connection with the green land, then, Joseph recognizes that death inhabits his ranch and, eloquently, this recognition is paralleled with the sickness of another character, Willie, who dreams that "he is in a bright place that is dry and dead, and people come out of holes and pull off his arms and legs" (13). These haunting images are thus intercalated at the beginning of the novel with the already analyzed moments in which Joseph lustfully attempts to fertilize the land, or recognizes, mystically, the spirit of his father as inhabiting the big oak tree. Hence from the start the text juxtaposes scenes of profuse fecundity and their counterpoint, the lingering threat of the "dry years" (12) that came before—preventing the land from ever being homestead before Joseph arrived—and most certainly will come again. Meyer argues that "the contiguity of penetration and possession imagery with the 'refrain' of the inescapable presence of the dead, the repeated motifs of blood and sacrifice, function as a counterlandscape to the mimetic topography in *To a God Unknown*" (84). In this view, Steinbeck's text not only juxtaposes opposing imagery, but also two diverting landscapes: the mimetic topography of the Nuestra Señora valley, in central California, and a superimposed mythical land, the Waste Land in which the sexual imagery of fecundity and fertility rituals coalesces with the occupation of the land by hordes of ghosts and corpses coming out of the holes in the ground, where the dead and the seeds coexist until, as in "The Burial of the Dead," they become undistinguishable, for the dead become the seeds, and death permeates all life.

Including the life of Joseph's child, the embodiment of the man-god's indispensable fecundity, whose birth is announced at the end of winter, therefore bringing forward the coming of spring. But as in *The Waste Land*, the plentiful new life bred in April can no longer be dispossessed of its intrinsic cruelty. As Elizabeth's pregnancy progresses, she grows sick, and weakened with fear and illness, she decides to visit the holiest place in Joseph's land: the grove among the pine trees that hides a rock and a stream. It is a talisman of fertility for Indian women; for Joseph, it is a sacred place to visit in time of need to "be fed" (Steinbeck 30). For the rock is believed to have nurturing as well as generative and healing properties, which, arguably, facilitates its identification with the mythical Grail.[7]

In a summary of what he calls "the chief romances of the Grail," Roger Sherman Loomis identifies four basic forms adopted by this magical object in the medieval sources: a dish, a chalice, a stone, and a salver (Loomis 2). As it is represented in John Steinbeck's *To a God Unknown*, the Grail takes the form of a stone, hidden in a truly perilous 'Perilous Chapel' that is described as an edifice "something like an altar that had melted and run down over itself" (Steinbeck 29). Unexpectedly, however, even in the modern degenerate world that remained in the wake of the 'wasteland writers', the source of peril in this chapel is the Grail itself which, at last, from a source of life and sustenance, has been irredeemably transformed into a terrible talisman of death.

The rock in the centre of the "holy" glade is described as "big as a house, mysterious and huge (…) shaped, cunningly and wisely" (29). Later on, when Elizabeth finds it on her own, guided by some inexplicable instinct, "her eyes centered upon the rock and her mind wrestled with its suggestive shape" (99). Both descriptions might induce the reader to suspect a hidden phallic symbolism, which, in spite of the fact that "there was no shape in the memory to match it" (29), seems to be a sensible assumption when related to the image that the text confronts to the moss-covered mysterious rock;

[7] One of the Arthurian romances that has been more influent in modern culture, the *Parzival* of Wolfram von Eschenbach (c. 1170 – c. 1220) that inspired Wagner's *Parsifal* (1880), is remarkable among the Grail sources because of how it reconciles the conception of the Grail as a pagan talisman of plenty and as a sacred container of the Corpus Christi, as it was explained in the introduction (p. 9) But even more significantly for a myth-critical interpretation of *To a God Unknown*, Eschenbach represents the holy, nurturing grail as a *stone* that "receives all that is good on earth of food and drink, of paradisal excellence" (Eschenbach 240). Meaningfully, Joseph Campbell connects the representation of the Grail as a stone in Eschenbach with the philosopher's stone of alchemy (429) and, following Nietzsche, he criticizes its transformation into a "glowing super-chalice of Christ's blood" in Wagner's *Parsifal* as being "a note of Christian sanctimoniousness that is inappropriate" (430). This interpretation will be very relevant in the next chapter, as Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* actually includes a reference to a representation of Wagner's opera in a crucial moment of the text.

that is, a great black bull, hornless, but with a "long, black swinging scrotum, which hung nearly to the knees" (29). Yet regardless of whether the reader may speculate with regards to the shape of the rock, the ambivalence of the symbols must be carefully examined so as to the decode the ambivalent meaning of the rock as representation of the Grail.

The process of symbolic ambivalence in the representation of the Waste Land myth crystallized, as already explored, in *The Waste Land*, a poem in which, for instance, prevailing symbols such as the Tarot or the hooded figure in "What the Thunder Said" function in two opposite directions, representing both regeneration and the failure of regeneration.[8] Something similar happens in *To a God Unknown* with, for example, the symbolism of the hornless bull in the grove, which, being hornless, suggests an eschatological mythical representation of a world that has come to its end (Post 56).[9] Yet, simultaneously, the description of the bull (and its genitalia) emphasizes its sexual potency, as it befits its emplacement on a mythical space where natives go in search of vigour and fecundity. Hence the image of the bull raises expectations of fecund sexuality and virility, yet those expectations are once again frustrated, as the bull is hornless, and thus powerless (Post 56). This symbolic ambivalence, however, quickly transforms into a sort of *mythical* ambivalence, which bring about a truly radical reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth: the ambivalent representation of the Grail itself.

The explicitly ambivalent representation of the Grail in *To a God Unknown* has no precedent in the tradition of mythical reinterpretation explored in this study, even though there are examples that somehow prelude it. Most clearly, in *The Great Gatsby*, Nick identified Daisy with Gatsby's Grail so as to aesthetically comprehend and explain in narrative (romantic) form the incorruptibleness of James Gatz's platonic dream. Daisy however turned out to be a destructive force in Gatsby's life, but it should be observed that she was only 'the Grail' within the limits of Gatsby's dream, as Nick perceived it. In the end, it was the inadequacy between dream and reality, and Gatsby's refusal to account for it, which resulted in his death. In *The Great Gatsby*, the Grail is not corrupt because it is identified with Daisy; but rather, Daisy is not actually the Grail

[8] See p. 196 and p. 199.

[9] Post sustains this claim in relation to the presence of bulls in Finno-Ugric mythology, which identifies the bull's horns as "the life force itself" (56). This reading is pertinent insofar as it is cognate with the interpretations of bulls as a symbol of sexual vigour and life renewal in the study of Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* in the previous chapter. Arguably, a hornless bull is a bull that has 'become a cow', following the emasculating results of the bullfighting ritual (See p. 279).

because *she* is corrupted.[10] Something similar could be argued about Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*. Initially, he might be indentified with the Grail inasmuch as he is the object pursued by Marlow (Watt *Conrad* 188). However, in this case, given the functional identification between Kurtz and the mythical Maimed King—for he is, not unlike Joseph Wayne, a quite obvious embodiment of Frazer's divine king—this study has interpreted that having Kurtz be the object pursued by Marlow in fact demonstrates the misguided nature of the journey, as what should have been a Grail Quest, becomes the hopeless search for the Maimed King instead.[11] It should be noted, also, that in the chapter devoted to the study of *The Sun Also Rises*, this study challenged the possibility that the Grail could ever be profaned, for the very structure and ideological foundation of the romance mode does not allow anyone unworthy to ever complete the quest.[12] Such a statement stands true, in spite of the ambivalent representation of the Grail in *To a God Unknown*. Because in this new stage of mythical reinterpretation, the Grail has not been corrupted by outside forces; but it is (progressively) represented as inherently *evil* or, at least, as an ineluctable source of destruction. The process of mythical subversion is then irretraceable. For the mythical source of restoration is no longer just vain or unreachable; reaching the paroxysm of a process that, as successively explored throughout this study, reverses the governing principle of the pre-modern myth (the traditionally redeeming Grail), the Grail has become the actual source of the desolation that plights the Waste Land.

In *To a God Unknown*, Elizabeth, pregnant but also sick, is carried toward the glade by an overwhelming desire for "only the trees" (Steinbeck 97), and, as she reaches the "huge, misshapen green rock," she realizes: "I knew it was here. Something in my breast told me it was here, this dear good thing" (99). Upon contemplating the rock, Elizabeth's irritated nerves settle, and she undergoes a mystical experience that seems to validate the generative powers attributed to the magical rock by the old Indians and by Joseph, for, "as [Elizabeth] gazed at the rock she saw her own child curled head-downward in her womb, and she saw it stir slightly, and felt its movement at the same time" (99). But as the whispering of the tree leaves grows louder, Elizabeth's mystical

[10] Nick's identification of Daisy with the Grail is inextricable from Nick's understanding and narrating of Gatsby's dream as incorruptible; yet as critics have argued, Daisy's maiden name (Fay) allow for her identification with Morgan le Fay, since she could also be argued to embody a strong kind of magic insofar as "she creates an illusion of innocent beauty that endures virtually until [Gatsby's] death" (Lupack and Lupack 151).
[11] See p. 176.
[12] See note 87, p. 271.

contemplation becomes suddenly terrible: “it came upon her that she could have anything she wished, and in the train of this thought there came the fear that she most wished for death” (99-100). In that instant, the world changes around her:

> There was a rustling in the forest now, not soft but sharp and malicious. She looked quickly at the rock and saw that its shape was as evil as a crouched animal and as gross as a shaggy goat. A stealthy cold had crept in to the glade. Elizabeth sprang to her feet in panic and her hands rose up and held her breasts. A vibration of horror was sweeping through the glade. The black trees cut off escape. There was the great rock crouching to spring. She backed away, fearing to take her eyes from it. When she had reached the entrance of the broad trail, she thought she saw a shaggy creature stir within the cave. The whole glade was alive with fear. (100)

Elizabeth’s visit to the rock—that is, to the allegedly nurturing, regenerative Grail—should have ensured the prosperity brought about by her pregnancy; that is, by the birth of the divine king’s successor and the demonstration of his reproductive capacity, which sympathetically would be transferred to the land. Yet the opposite actually happens. Elizabeth feels literally attacked by the holy rock, which in her eyes transforms into a crouching creature, ready to spring at her. She had wished for death, and death will be given to her. Not in vain, the birth of Joseph’s child is eloquently followed by the death of the oak tree, which, as previously commented, is both represented as the cause and the emblem of the wasting of the land that is to follow. For immediately after the tree dies, and his bark grows “as hostile as the rest of the earth” (118), Elizabeth’s sickness aggravates and spreads throughout the ranch, infecting all its inhabitants. As Joseph notices that the land “seemed to be dying” (121), Elizabeth informs about her visit to the rock, and states how “something evil came into it (…) something malicious was in the glade, something that wanted to destroy [her]” (123). She blames in on “her condition” (123) and, when she feels better, she wishes to go back, certain that she will not be afraid again, and wanting “to insult it [=the rock] because it frightened [her]” (123). Joseph obliges, and on their way to the glade they notice that the earth is turning white due to the persistent drought that has followed the death of the oak tree. But as they reach the pine grove they realize that the stream by the rock is still running, and Joseph believes: “It’s as though the country were not dead while stream is running. This is like a vein still pumping blood” (127). Unfortunately, once again, such expectations of persistent life-force and eventual regeneration are immediately thwarted, for Elizabeth, no longer scared of the rock, decides to “climb up

on its back and tame it" (128). Tragedy strikes immediately. As Elizabeth tries to climb, her heels digging "black scars" (128) in the rock, the moss covering the rock strips off and she falls, breaking her neck. Right away it begins to rain but, before the reader—not before Joseph, who will ultimately kill himself believing wholeheartedly in the generative potency of his sacrifice—might be confused into interpreting Elizabeth's death as a regenerative sacrifice to end the drought, the rain stops suddenly, and the clouds withdraw towards the ocean. In the same way as the soft spring drizzle at the end of *The Waste Land* inevitably takes the reader back to the beginning of the poem, hence trapping him within the Waste Land,[13] the rain after Elizabeth's death only serves to exacerbate the drought, because Joseph's wife has died, and thus Joseph has lost the capacity to reproduce his kind. Eloquently, right after he returns home that same night, he finds Rama, his sister-in-law, waiting for him, naked, after she has understood that reproduction is certainly "a need" (Steinbeck 135) to Joseph. Yet, even as "her hungry limbs drew irritably the agonizing seed of his body" (135), Joseph's generative power proves to be truly agonizing; following his encounter with Rama, "the earth grew more grey and lifeless every week" (136).

THE DYING LAND OF THE WEST

As Joseph's incapacity to reproduce himself—represented from the beginning in the flouting of the principles of the sympathetic magic that sustained him as a divine-king figure—are made explicit, and his identification with the mythical Maimed King unavoidable, the wasting of his land grows more and more acute, and with no hope for regeneration, as "the duty of keeping life in [the] land is beyond [his] power" (140). He gives his child to Rama, and she leaves. There is no longer a chance of a successor who can inherit Joseph's divine spirit—as he inherited it from his father—so that the crops, the cattle and the men in his land will not perish from a widespread disease (Frazer 313). And because there is no successor, Joseph's sacrificial death is ineluctably futile; restoration is, once again, impossible.

In *Creative Mythologies,* the fourth and last part of Joseph Campbell's series, *The Masks of God,* he summarizes the Grail Knight's task as follows: "The problem of the

[13] See p. 210.

Grail hero will therefore be: to ask the question[14] relieving the Maimed King in such a way as to inherit his role *without* [inheriting] the wound" (Campbell 424).[15] Such is in fact the mythological correlative to Frazer's ritualistic succession, which displaces the mythical healing of the Fisher King: a vigorous heir must sacrifice the old, ailing king (Frazer 310) so the spirit of vegetation lives on in the successor. But in *To a God Unknown*, Joseph's Wayne has no heir, and in sacrificing himself he is actually impersonating the successor tasked with the mission of killing the king. In doing so, Joseph counteracts the narrative pattern that should have resulted in the restoration of the land, bringing about a coalescence of the Fisher-King figure and the Grail-Knight figure in one single character. Crucially, this circumstance—that prevents the culmination of the hero-as-redeemer archetype—becomes prominent in novels in the American tradition that reinterpret the Waste Land myth after the 1930s. In *To a God Unknown*, for the first time, the reader finds a *fusion* of both mythical characters in the moment in which the Maimed King, Joseph, having no successor to perform the sacrifice, kills himself, climbing onto the rock, as Elizabeth did, and cutting open the veins of his wrist.

Before his death, Joseph—the Maimed King—is ill, of course; both Juanito and the priest of the town warn him (Steinbeck 164, 172), but Joseph insists that he "is well" (164). So in the end, instead of understanding that his sickness is the cause to the barrenness of his land, Joseph mistakes himself for a redeemer. Even the priest believes that he has to die without legacy; that is, he has to die as a barren Maimed King, or "else there might be a new Christ here in the West" (132). Consequently, the novel closes with Joseph's (misguided) self-sacrifice; the king dies without an heir, and only at the last instant does he realize that "[he is] the rain" (179). When he dies, it starts to rain, as it happened after Elizabeth's death; but this time the rain does not stop and, in celebration, the town's people dance, chant, and pound the earth hysterically, beastly; and the waters keep on rushing.

It would not be unreasonable to understand this ending as the final coming of rebirth. But after the literature of the 1920s and the symbolic paradigm established by

[14] Joseph Campbell is of course referring to the earliest extant version of the Grail myth, Chrétien de Troyes's, in which, as it is well known, if "Perceval the Wretched" had asked about the meaning of the Grail that he saw being carried through the Fisher King's castle, he "would have brought great succour to the good king who is maimed: he would have totally regained the use of limbs and ruled his lands, and much good would have come of it!" (Troyes 425).

[15] This hypothesis will be once again revisited and expanded on in the following chapters (see e.g., pp. 177-178.)

the ‘wasteland writers’, the attentive reader cannot help but remember Madame Sosostris’s warning to fear death by water; or, for that matter, Ellen Thatcher’s haunting song about the flood survived solely by one man. Both are representations of a rising of the waters that is ultimately destructive; irreparably, the ‘wasteland literature’ of the 1920s codified water as a symbol of death, and so in *To a God Unknown* it is noted that “before a spring goes dry it grows a little” (Steinbeck 169). At best, one might argue that Joseph’s death in fact brings about a temporary regeneration of the land that will last only until the dry years return; at worst, Joseph’s mythically-perverse suicide results in the catastrophic flood prophesied by the ‘wasteland writers.’ The time of nature is a cycle, but, like April, “the cycle is too cruel” (107). Because in *To a God Unknown*, as in *The Waste Land*, the land revives, but the water that comes at the end of both texts cannot restore what has been lost. The perversion of the regenerative ritual pattern in Joseph’s suicide, as well as the drastic reinterpretation of the Stone-Grail as a deleterious talisman of death that not only kills Elizabeth—and thus Joseph’s reproductive capacity—but also fails to provide the restoration falsely announced by the rain that follows her death, seem to indicate that the storm at the end of the novel is not dissimilar from the originally “dry, sterile thunder without rain” (Eliot *TWL* 342) that, at last, with a flash of lightening and a damp gust, brings down the rain in *The Waste Land* and incites the cruelty of April.

As Post argues, the rock in *To a God Unknown*—that is, the Grail—“is a stela to remind humanity that below the thin and fragile surface that it knows as life exists a vast and insensitive sepulcher of all that has come before, all that is, and all that will come to be” (Post 70). The Perilous Chapel at the end is then no longer empty, as it was in *The Waste Land*, but it guards a Grail that is no longer a mystical source of life, but a reminder of the vanity of our existence, and of the fact that life springs from death, and death pervades all life. Rites of regeneration are futile, and restorative sacrifices are ineffectual. As Post explains, “[Joseph] will become a part of the earth-cemetery on which the living will continue to scamper and scramble” (72). He will be one corpse more, an indistinguishable voice among the many that articulate the “root consciousness”[16] of the dead that have been cruelly transformed into seed. Joseph’s death will bring about new life, but such life will be tainted, haunted, and swollen with death. As it transpires from a myth-critical reading of *To a God Unknown*, the plight of

[16] See note 40, p. 326.

the eastern wastelands explored in the novels of the nineteen-twenties has expanded fully to the West, traditionally the Eden of America,[17] finally completing a depiction of a "dying land" that in fact stands for "the entire twentieth-century American landscape" (Post 8).

Joseph's land revives, yet it remains *waste*. For primarily the myth of the Waste Land is, as Post describes in her study of *To a God Unknown*, "an example of the restoration of a culture that has been destroyed by inward decay, and it illustrates how the spiritual is woven into the fabric of politics. After all, the goal of the grail quest is the regeneration of land, which also means the restoration of the order governing it" (61). But, as the 'wasteland writers' of the 1920s established, such restoration is no longer possible in the world that survived the First World War. *To a God Unknown* goes even further in the mythical representation of such social climate of hopelessness and desolation. It *fuses* the mythical figures of the Fisher King and the Grail Knight, which up until then clearly stood at opposing ends of the mythical pattern, irreconcilably differentiated by the barrier that separates—or used to separate—the sick and the well.[18] And it also initiates a trend in representing the Grail as a mythical talisman of *death*. This new, radical reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth will in fact continue through the following decades in the American literary traditional to give account of the rapidly changing global context that resulted in the Second World War (1939-1945) and of its socially and spiritually devastating aftermath, for, as it will be explored in depth in the following chapters, the mythical reverberations of the works of Eliot, Hemingway, Fitzgerald and other modernist writers actually infused the work of many contemporary American authors, who realized and conveyed in their works the terrible understanding that, after World War II, "life offered further socioeconomic and political corroboration of the reality of the wasteland—a wasteland more extreme than Eliot could ever have conceived" (Lupack and Lupack 210).

[17] See p. 245.
[18] See p. 265.

CHAPTER 12

DJUNA BARNES'S *NIGHTWOOD*: DISASSEMBLING MYTH

NO MAN'S LAND

Nightwood, published by Djuna Barnes in 1936, edited and with an introduction by T.S. Eliot, is well-known among contemporary critics for its remarkably explicit depiction of homosexuality and for the use of an intricate, deeply symbolic prose that seemingly corroborates Eliot's famous remark that the novel "would appeal primarily to the readers of poetry" (in Barnes xvii). By such a statement Eliot means that "only sensibilities trained on poetry can wholly appreciate [the novel]" (XVIII). Undoubtedly, such categorical appraisal of Barnes's text needs to be approached with caution, yet it becomes useful for this study inasmuch as it allows the reappraisal of Barnes's text as inextricable from the immediately precedent poetry tradition. Because *Nightwood*, as an instance of late modernism that portrays the decadent way of living of that generation of expatriates who lived in Paris during the rotten twenties, is clearly very much indebted to the literature of that decade; but also to modernist poetry in particular, and to *The Waste Land* specifically. Even though traditionally, feminist criticism has regarded Barnes's novel as the aesthetic expression of "the expatriation of lesbian culture from literary history (...) threatening to begin a whole [new] literary history for a coming age that liberates female coming" (Gilber and Gubar *Sexchanges*, 236), this myth-critical study argues that, far from simply contesting or rejecting the themes and tropes of 'male

modernism', *Nightwood* is in integral to the modernist tradition, and in fact represents, while transforming—for it reinterprets the myth that functions as design for the novel—the sexual anxieties of its literary predecessors.

Nightwood definitely partakes of "[the] pattern of anxiety that we shall find recurring, with interesting differences, in different stages of modernism" (Kermode 96); that is to say, the "sense of an ending" that Kermode considered endemic to modernism (98) and that expresses the apocalyptic temperament most eloquently articulated through the 'mythical method' developed in the 1920s. Because *Nightwood* is above all a mythical novel that reinterprets the Waste Land myth so as to articulate a narrative that both encompasses and finally subverts the theory of degeneration,[19] which as already explained, brought about "the construction of brand new pathologies, whose meanings rested on the belief that deviance manifests itself in the visible body" (Seitler 527). *Nightwood* is indeed a narrative construed around those brand new pathologies—homosexuality, hysteria, feeble-mindedness, atavism, and neurasthenia[20]—established by degeneration theory, but due to its mythical dimension, and to the radical reinterpretation of myth that Barnes's novel carries out, the *morbidification* of modern life, so to speak, brought about degeneration theory is in fact subverted and re-signified into becoming a new of kind of mythopoeia for the collapsed world of the Interwar period.

As a (new form of) novel, *Nightwood* partakes in the modernist renovation of the narrative genre:[21] it bears no resemblance to nineteenth-century fiction and it conveys "the sense of an ending" argued by Frank Kermode (1967) as a defining trait of modernist fiction. Yet Barnes's modernism is transformative with regards to the (male) modernism so far explored in this study. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar eloquently argued, *Nightwood* actually represents, parodies, and ultimately subverts the canonical parameters of the "no man's land"; that is, the mythical space occupied by a seemingly unending series of symbolically and literally castrated men up until then privileged in men's modernist texts:

[19] See p. 169.
[20] Dana Seitler (539) summarizes from the degenerative theories of Krafft-Ebing, Nordau, and Lombroso. See p. 169.
[21] Eliot famously wrote in "Ulysses, Order and Myth" that, in the nineteenth century, the novel had ceased to be a literary form to become the expression of an extinguished age. Perhaps, this is why he specified that, if *Nightwood* was to be considered a novel, it is one primarily meant for readers of poetry.

> From the betrayed and passive narrator of Ford's *Good Soldier* to cuckolded Leopold Bloom in Joyce's *Ulysses* and the wounded Fisher King in Eliot's *The Waste Land* to the eunuch Jake Barnes in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, the paralyzed Clifford Chatterley in Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and the gelded Benjy in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* as well as the castrated Joe Christmas in *Light in August*, maimed, unmanned, victimized characters are obsessively created by early twentieth-century literary men. (*War of the Words* 35-6)

So far, this study has focused on exploring the mythical dimension of texts in which all, some, or any of the mythemes that make up the Waste Land myth functioned prominently and significantly so as to articulate relevant ideological reformulations of the myth. In this myth-critical reassessment, the examination of Fisher-King figures—certainly *some* of the characters listed by Gilbert and Gubar in the afore-quoted excerpt—has been crucial and, even though this fourth part of the study is more heavily focused on the reinterpretation of the Grail as the key element in the process of mythical reinterpretation leading toward postmodernism, the charismatic presence of a newly reinterpreted Fisher-King figure in *Nightwood* is indisputable and, more to the point, operates as a link that explicitly connects Barnes's novel with the modernist tradition of the 1920s. In *Nightwood*, there is a maimed, unmanned, victimized man: the Doctor, Matthew-Mighty-grain-of-salt-Dante-O'Connor; but as a new embodiment of the king of the Waste Land, the Doctor—"half-man, half-woman" (Winterson in Barnes xiii)—embodies a clearly divergent reinterpretation with regards to the no-men listed above.

Nightwood's Fisher King is "a flamboyant cross-dresser and gourmet sodomite" (Chisholm 190). He lives, literally, in death, in a room "so small that it was just possible to walk sideways up to the bed, it was as if being condemned to the grave the Doctor had decided to occupy it with the utmost abandon" (Barnes 70). As a doctor, O'Connor is meant to be a healer, but, being "condemned to the grave," he is portrayed as irreparably sick. Definitively and irrevocably, as it will be detailed further on, the barrier that separated the sick and the well has fallen.[22] In a paroxysm of the symbolic ambivalence described in previous chapters, a symbol in a text no longer stands in for two opposing references, as the hooded figure in *The Waste Land*, or the hornless bull in *To a God Unknown*.[23] Now symbolic ambivalence has completely transformed into *mythical* ambivalence: the Doctor is the healer (certainly in myth-ritualistic terms) but he is also the sick king in need of restoration, because sickness has spread, and it has

[22] See previous chapter, p. 310.
[23] See p. 196, and p. 304.

infected the Grail Knight (Nora) and every other character in the novel. As a consequence, the different mythemes that compose the myth become progressively indistinguishable, as they are represented ambivalently in Barnes's text.

In the most crucial episode in the novel, the Doctor appears lying in bed, "in a woman's flannel nightgown" (Barnes 71), among dirty sheets, excrements and women's underclothes used during sexual intercourse (70-71). He wears a wig, is "heavily rouged" and his eyelashes are painted. He is dressed and made up as a woman, and by cross-dressing he is said to have "evacuated custom and gone back into his dress" (71). In the seminal essay "Costumes of the Mind: Transvestism as Metaphor in Modern Literature," Sandra Gilbert vindicates the character's transvestism, arguing that *Nightwood* "hurls us back through tunnels of history and literature to the third-sexed figures of Robin Vote and Dr. O'Connor" (413) in search for a "utopian ceremonial androgyny" (415). Such process of questing for ancestral androgyny is realized, according to this argument, through the fluidity of gender identities; but, as this chapter argues, such a quest in fact partakes in a process of mythical subversion, inasmuch as it reverses—while representing in a very iconic way—the quest-adventure tradition that articulates the Waste Land myth. Nora Flood's literal quest to find Robin[24] leads her directly to the Maimed King, confined to bed, to whom she asks the question that seems to hold the meaning of all life, "Watchman, What of the Night?"[25]. But her quest is in fact a journey backwards in time.

DECONSTRUCTING MYTH

Sandra Gilbert asserted in the previously mentioned essay that "many twentieth-century women have struggled—sometimes exuberantly, sometimes anxiously—to define a gender-free reality *behind or beneath myth*, an ontological essence so pure, so free that 'it' can 'inhabit' any self, any costume" (394, my italics). To allow for such a reading, however, myth—as a symbolic representation of the world that functions first and

[24] Notice the surname, *Flood*. Nora, within the mythical dimension of the novel, is counterpart of the Grail Knight in charge of completing the Grail Quest, and restoring the King's health and the fertility of the land; yet her surname quite conspicuously signifies the threat of "death by water" that haunts the modernist reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth from Eliot onwards.

[25] The question is not formulated in these exact terms in the text. "Watchman, What of the Night?" is the title of Chapter 5, in which the episode takes place.

foremost as an *ordering* device[26]—must be represented in a way that allows for the destabilization of the hierarchical conceptual oppositions that articulate mythical thought, because, as Meletinsky concludes, "the fundamental building blocks of mythological systems of symbolic classification are not motifs but relationships in the sense of elementary semantic oppositions" (208). Significantly, it was precisely the myth-and-ritual theory, so influential in the literature of modernism, which, through the writings of Lévi-Strauss in later decades, contributed considerably to the structuralist interpretation of myth. It was this interpretation that, later on, allowed for the theoretical deconstruction of mythological systems, as they were revealed to be cultural constructs sustained on a binary classification of reality. Christopher Norris explains:

> Lévi-Strauss rests his analyses of myth and ritual on the conviction that, behind all the surface varieties thrown up by the world's different cultures, there exist certain deep regularities and patterns which reveal themselves to structural investigation. It is a matter looking beyond their manifest content to the structures of symbolic opposition and sequence that organize these various narratives. At a certain level of abstraction, he argues, it is possible to make out patterns of development and formal relations which cut right across all distinctions of culture and nationality. Myths can then be seen as a problem-solving exercise, adapted to context in various ways but always leading back to the great abiding issues of human existence—mainly the structures of law and taboo surrounding such institutions as marriage, the family, tribal identity, and so forth. (…) Derrida reads Lévi-Strauss as an heir to both Saussure's 'phonocentric' bias and Rousseau's nostalgic craving for origins and presence. The two lines of thought converge in what Derrida shows to be a subtle but weighted dialectic between 'nature' and 'culture'. (36-7)

The representation of the Waste Land myth found in *Nightwood* is thus inherently subversive, because it exposes as ideologically constructed what myth traditionally narrated as aprioristically natural. But paradoxically, *Nightwood* is only continuing a debatable demythologizing process already initiated by Eliot,[27] but taking a step forward and noticeably changing direction. For rather than dismantling myth so as to reassemble it afterwards and hence restore the symbolic order established through mythopoeia, Barnes's text deliberately leaves myth disassembled, aiming to recover, as

[26] As Eleazar M. Meletinsky has demonstrated, and as it has been argued repeatedly throughout this study, modern ethnology has shown that "mythopoesis is an ancient *symbolic language* with characteristics all its own that reproduce, classify, and interpret nature, society and individuals" (1998: 116).

[27] Arguably, it may have been initiated long before, already in the first instances of representation of the Waste Land myth in post-medieval literature. After all, the critical examination of the artificiality of romance as a mere artistic convention removed from 'true life' and utilized to emplot history and legitimate dominant power ideologies has been a constant in the myth-critical analysis carried out in this study.

feminist criticism has argued, the pre-symbolic, gender-free chaos that preceded the symbolic classification of the world that takes place in mythopoetic thought. In this view the subversive representation of myth in Barnes's novel "remodels the symbolic order" through "the influx of the semiotic" (Kristeva 62); that is to say, by fully exposing the power of poetic language, it executes "a transgression of the symbolic" (Kristeva 62)—or, what is the same, it executes a transgression of myth and of its "universal signifying order" (62).

As mentioned, a fundamental element in the process of mythical reinterpretation carried out in *Nightwood* is the mythical ambivalence embodied in characters such as the Doctor, who might be identified with both the healer and the sick king. This ambivalent characterization of the Doctor undoubtedly deconstructs the binary opposition between the textual referent—e.g., Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises*[28]—and the mytheme that is made reference to—the mythical Fisher King of Arthurian romance. The binary opposition between signified and signifier (as all binary oppositions) is hierarchical, and previous representations of the myth respected this hierarchy, as they recognized the primacy of the signified; that is, meaning (reference) pre-exists the word (referent). The Fisher King is one single mythical element that predates its multiple textual representations. Yet *Nightwood* subverts this hierarchical dichotomy. Doctor O'Connor is one single character, but in fact embodies two mythical figures that up until now were separated and indissoluble: the healer (the Grail Knight) and the one who must be healed (the Fisher King).[29] Thus in *Nightwood* word precedes meaning and thus meaning (and myth) cannot be regarded as absolutely, unquestionably true. Myth—the reference— having lost its transcendental *a-priori* meaning as the expression of a *natural* understanding of the world, is now overtly revealed as containing a contingent meaning that has been constructed through the interplay with its multiple (and changeable) textual representations.

In the documentary *Derrida*, the French philosopher explains that "one of the gestures of deconstruction is to not naturalize what isn't natural, to not assume that what is conditioned by history, institutions, or society is natural" (Dirk and Zierig 2002).

[28] Djuna Barnes and Hemingway's protagonist share their last name, a fact that, as it has been discussed by critics, is far from incidental (see Hays 161).

[29] The notion of a signifier that seems to predate its (multiple) signifieds was already present, as it has been examined, in texts such as *The Waste Land* in cases like the hooded figure in "What the Thunder Said" or the Tarot Cards of Madame Sosostris (see. p. 196 and p. 199), but the inversion of the signified-signifier dichotomy had not been yet extended to the mythemes operative in Eliot's poem so explicitly, even though, as explained, it could already be intuited in some aspects of Steinbeck's *To a God Unknown* (see p. 308).

Thus, the deconstruction of myth could be explained as the revelation of its *cultural* construction and, accordingly, the overt disclosure of its *naturalizing* intent. In this view, *Nightwood* could be interpreted as initiating a process of mythical deconstruction that is in fact continued and exacerbated in the following decades. Because *Nightwood* reshapes myth by transforming its literary representation, as well as the other texts analyzed in this study; yet now that process of reshaping is clearly and unprecedentedly self-aware, to the point where in the fifth chapter of the novel, as the Doctor—the King—attempts to answer Nora's transcendental (and healing) question, he refers explicitly to a representation of Wagner's opera *Parsifal*. To help Nora understand "all of the night" (Barnes 85), he tells her about a woman among the audience who found redemption by committing the error of *mistaking* the Holy Grail. The Doctor explains: "even that evil in us comes to an end, errors may make you immortal—one woman went down the ages for sitting through *Parsifal* up to the point where the swan got his death, whereupon she screamed out 'Godamercy, they have shot the Holy Grail!'—but not every one is as good as that" (86).[30] Reading these words carefully, the perceptive reader will realize that, in *Nightwood*, what is believed to bring redemption from the evil of the night is not (and cannot be) the understanding of the meaning behind the Grail, but actually the *failure* to recognize the Grail or, rather, the recognition of its *ambivalence* as a symbol. The woman in the audience of Wagner's opera fails to identify the Christian, sanctimonious "super-chalice" (Campbell 430) as the Grail; she chooses instead the swan, and is thus horrified when the swan is killed, believing that they had dared *shoot* the Holy Grail. Bizarre as it may be, this episode calls attention upon the impossibility to identify one true redemptive Grail, arguing per contra that it is the *mistake* that redeems the woman "sitting through" Wagner's opera, and not even the surrogate Grail she finds in the killed swan.

THE KNIGHT'S CONFESSION

This odd kind of parable coincides with the scene in the novel that enacts the climax of the Grail myth *per se*; that is to say, the moment when the Grail Knight finds lodging in

[30] The implied criticism of Wagner's opera is evident and pertinent, for, as previously mentioned (note 7, p. 303), the critique against Wagner's play had centred on his excessively and "sanctimoniously" Christianized representation of the Grail as "glowing super-chalice of Christ's blood" (Campbell 430) that seemed to neglect the pagan, esoteric nature of the Grail in Wagner's source, Eschenbach's *Parzival*.

the Fisher King's castle and must decide whether to ask or not the question that will relieve the King and restore his land. Perceval fails to ask the question in the original romance; Nora asks the question in *Nightwood*, but in vain. Later, the Doctor recognizes, in his conversation with her, that, "in your chair should have been set the Holy Stone" (113). Those words certify the clear identification between the self-confessed sick, homosexual, transgender and impotent—"and all the while Tiny O'Toole was lying in a swoon" (119)—Doctor O'Connor with the Fisher King, while the central position and transcendence of the question asked by Nora—"Watchman, What of the Night?"—allows for the scene to be interpreted as counterpart to the encounter between the Fisher King and the Grail Knight in the original myth. Simultaneously—but not contradictorily, as it in fact reinforces a myth-critical interpretation—the conversation between Nora and the Doctor may also be read as a ritual of confession, understanding such confession, as Veltman suggests, referencing Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, as a (frustrated) rite of regeneration. In this view, the dialogue between Nora and the Doctor "lampoons the rite of Catholic confession" (Veltman 214), in addition to also parodying a psychoanalytic session in which the doctor (that is, the healer) outtalks the patient (that is, the sick) and thus renders the 'talking cure' of psychoanalysis utterly futile (214).[31]

From a myth-critical perspective, the interpretation of the scene as representing the narrative climax in the Grail myth can also make use of the consideration of the encounter between Nora and the Doctor as invoking both a confession and a psychoanalytic session, as, firstly, both 'rites' are intended as healing processes—spiritually and mentally, respectively—and, secondly, both 'rites' are ineluctably frustrated in *Nightwood*. Reading the scene in purely mythical terms, Nora is the counterpart of the Grail Knight who visits the Fisher's King's castle and (in this case) dares ask the question. However, the superimposition of this mythical structure over the patterns of a confession and a session of psychoanalysis immediately places Nora in the role of the penitent/patient seeking for redemption and healing. Therefore, the encounter between the Grail Knight and the Fisher King is thus represented as meant for the

[31] The novel insists on the relevance of confession as an empty (sexual) rite by means of repetition. Later in the novel, Doctor O'Connor tries to masturbate next to a confession box in St Merri, being "almost alone" (Barnes 119), and failing to overcome his impotence: "And there I was holding Tiny, bending over and crying (…) and I tiny away then, like a ruined bird, and went out of the place" (120). This scene of sexual incapacity significantly places the Doctor in the place of the penitent, reversing the roles played by the character in the climactic encounter between Doctor O'Connor and Nora, when he performs the role of priest.

deliverance of the Knight and not the King, albeit momentarily. Soon enough, this ambivalence is once again reverted, for as soon as Doctor O'Connor begins to answer Nora's question, he assumes the role of the penitent/patient, while remaining the priest/doctor at the same time.

As mentioned in previous chapters, Joseph Campbell claims that Perceval's unasked question—or, in this case, Nora's *asked* question—is "at root the same as Hamlet's 'to be or not to be,' since their concern is to learn the *meaning* of a circumstance 'thus come'—to which there is no answer" (424). Campbell continues his argument:

> There is, however, an *experience* possible, for which the hero's arrival at the world axis and his readiness to learn (as demonstrated his question) have proven him to be eligible. Will he be able to support it? Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, wrote of what he termed the 'Hamlet condition' of the one whose realization of the primal precondition of life ('All life is sorrowful!') has undercut his will to live. The problem of the Grail hero will therefore be: to as the question relieving the Maimed King in such a way as to inherit his role *without* the wound. (424)

Following Campbell's explanation, the encounter between the Grail Knight and the Maimed King should be read as a transaction of a potentially destructive knowledge that, were the Knight worth the task, would relieve the King from the paralysis enforced upon him by such terrible knowledge, without paralyzing the Knight in return. Nora realizes this: "'How do you stand it, then?' she demanded. 'How do you live at all, if this wisdom of yours is not only the truth, but also the price?'" (Barnes 80-1). As Nietzsche elaborates in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Hamlet's paralysis is due to having "at one time cast a true glance into the essence of things" (46), having thus gained "[the] true knowledge, insight into the horrific truth, [which] outweighs any motive leading to action" (46). From Campbell's perspective, such aberrant knowledge of the "essence of things" is the knowledge acquired by the eligible knight when or if he dares ask the transcendental question that has the power to reveal the meaning of the Grail. In such a terrible situation, the Grail Knight faces the problem of asking the question, acquiring the knowledge, but resisting the paralyzing wound that such knowledge has caused upon the King. The transaction of knowledge involved in the process will bring about, as Campbell makes obvious when he describes the hero's task as "inherit[ing] [the King's] role" (424), a royal succession that once again seems to endorse the argument in

favour of the myth's ritualistic pattern. The Grail Knight will relieve the King and succeed him, but in order for him to become a wholesome king, he must resist, not the "insight into the horrific truth" (Nietzsche 46), but the paralysis caused by such insight.

However, in *Nightwood*, presenting the encounter between the King and the Knight as a confession manages to invert the pattern, as knowledge is not transmitted from authority downward, but in reverse. As Foucault argues, a confession is a transformation of sex into discourse[32]—because "from the Christian penance to the present day, sex was a privileged theme of confession" (*Sexuality* 61)—that results from a "ritual of discourse (...) [that] unfolds within a power relationship" (61). But this ritual "finally takes effect, not in who receives [the truth], but in the one from whom is wrested" (62). Thus superimposing the structure of confession upon the structure of the myth, insofar as Doctor O'Connor is indentified with the role of confessor, entails that the King cannot ever be relieved, because the knowledge is passed through this rite in the opposite direction with regards to transaction of knowledge codified in the original myth. As T. S. Eliot argues in his introduction to *Nightwood*, in the new, subversive mythical pattern, the King can only "squeeze[] himself dry for other people, (…) getting no sustenance in return" (XIX).

THE NIGHT OF THE THIRD SEX

But the confessional pattern in the encounter between Nora and Doctor O'Connor has other implications as well. In Foucault's terms, "the confession was, and still remains, the general standard governing the production of the true discourse on sex" (*Sexuality* 63). This discourse on sex—produced first in the form of a confession—is codified towards the end of the nineteenth century into a discourse of science that, as already mentioned, *Nightwood* re-appropriates[33] and re-signifies through a process of mythical subversion. As already seen, the moment of confession in the novel corresponds with a climactic episode of the Waste Land myth in which, as it is represented in Barnes's

[32] Campbell decodes the encounter between the Grail Knight and the Fisher King as a transaction of transcendental knowledge. From the perspective of the myth-and-ritual theory, this transaction of knowledge constitutes a royal succession that is, in fact, a transaction of sexual vigour and reproductive capacity from the ailing father into his young and healthy heir (See p. 174).

[33] E.g., at the beginning of the novel, the Doctor asks: "Why is that whenever I hear music I think I'm a bride?" Baron Felix replies: "Neurasthenia" (Barnes 29).

novel, the hero's transcendental question aims to reveal the meaning of the *night*. But the *night* in *Nightwood* is life itself, yet life in a state of irreparable degradation; a life that has fallen into the darkness of the night's woods where the characters—the "night people" (Barnes 79)—abide. Seitler explains:

> Spaces of nocturnal addiction, intoxication, and circus revelry through which [the] characters circulate, bring Felix Volkbein's closeted Jewish identity, Nora's lesbianism, Robin's sexual flexibility, [and] Doctor O'Connor's transvestistic homosexuality (…) into alignment as they all linger in the excremental dialogue, melancholic irrationality, and destitution of sexual modernity that both the city and the wood at night come to symbolize. (549)

The "night people" are mostly characterized then by different forms of sexual deviance—'sick' in the contemporary discourse of science—which in fact accounts for a *zeitgeist* of degeneration that is represented as collective and irreversible. As Seitler claims, "*Nightwood* is a fractured, fragmentary tale of an assemblage of degenerates of multiple nationalities, sexualities, and genders who come together to restlessly celebrate the decay of the modern; each character couples with another in degenerate solidarity amidst the confusion and chaos of the stultifying, nocturnal landscapes of bourgeois modernity" (543). In this context, "degeneracy is an infectious plague" (Seitler 539) which constitutes a representation of modern destitution as a situation of collective disease—textually depicted through mythical reinterpretation—prominent in literature since the fin-de-siècle. As the Doctor himself states, "No man needs curing of his individual sickness, his universal malady is what he should look to" (Barnes 29).

As explained, confession as a ritual of discourse—and clearly represented as a (vain) ritual of regeneration in the novel by juxtaposing the mythical and confessional patterns—resulted in a scientific, authorised discourse of sex that was based upon the classification of the deficiencies and oddities found in people's pleasures.[34] Such a discourse, the clinical discourse of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century psychology, clearly defined homosexuality—or, as it was referred to at the time, 'sexual inversion'; a 'condition' that afflicts both Nora and Doctor O'Connor, i.e., the Grail Knight and the Fisher King in Barnes's representation of the Waste Land myth—in

[34] Michael Foucault argues: "Western societies thus began to keep an indefinite record of these people's pleasures. They made up a herbal of them and established a system of classification. They described their every-day deficiencies as well as their oddities or exasperations. This was an important time (...) It was a time when the most singular pleasures were called upon to pronounced a discourse of truth concerning themselves, a discourse which to model itself after that which spoke, not of sin and salvation, but of bodies and life processes—the discourse of science. (*Sexuality* 64)

strictly medical terms. Whether or not psychologists agreed on diagnosing homosexual tendencies as a disease, as a stigma of degeneration, or merely as a congenital anomaly,[35] the result of studies such as those carried out by Havelock Ellis and Krafft-Ebing was an authorized and generally-accepted morbidification of homosexuality through which, as Seitler explains, terms such as 'homosexual', 'lesbian' or 'invert' became "medicosexual categories" (531). In this view, evidently, the interpretation of Nora and the Doctor's characters as being sick is reinforced, but simultaneously, Barnes's novel actually subverts the official discourse that deemed homosexuality and transsexualism as forms of morbid psychology, because it turns around the official diagnosis of 'inversion' and portrays a plagued society in which *all* are sick, and degeneration is no longer understood as a deviance, but as the common trait, since there remains no wholesome genus in the world from which to deviate.

The transformation of the modernist tradition that is carried out by *Nightwood* lies in accepting the implications of such a claim. While up until then 'male' modernist discourses on degeneration had claimed for the recovery of a lost social order by appealing to myth—to "enduring, gender-connected myths" (Gilbert 394), as it is of course the Waste Land myth—*Nightwood* does not advocate for the recovery of an ordered, natural(ized) society through the reconstruction of myth; not even to verify—as the literature of the 1920s does—that it is no longer possible to give order and significance to disorder and anarchy without dismantling first and reshaping later 'true myth' and thus 'true meaning'. As the Doctor himself states, "no myth is safely broken" (Barnes 126-7), but there is no wish or nostalgia in Barnes's novel to retrieve the safety of a social order found in myth because, as it was previously explained, myth itself—the original version of myth, so to speak; the 'signified'—is in fact revealed as mere discursively created meaning, no truer or more real than any of its potentially infinite representations (or signifiers).

Feminist criticism has argued that "in the view of such women as Woolf and Barnes, th[e] social order is itself fallen or at least misguided. Thus the only redemption that they can imagine from the dis-order and dis-ease of gender is the symbolic chaos of transvestism, a symbolic chaos that is related not the narrow power of male mastery but (...) to the androgynous wholeness and holiness of prehistory" (Gilbert 415). In *Nightwood*, when the Grail Knight (Nora) meets the Fisher King (the Doctor), the

[35] See Ellis, Havelock. *Studies in the Psychology of Sex, Volume 2 (of 6)*, Chapter IV: "The Theory of Sexual Inversion."

Fisher King is wearing make-up, a wig, and a woman's nightgown; and as he answers Nora's question, and the meaning of the *night* is revealed, the Doctor discloses the truth—"but also the price" (Barnes 81)—that ails him:

> In the old days I was possibly a girl in Marseilles thumping the dock with a sailor, and perhaps it's the memory that haunts me. The wise men say that the remembrance of things past is all that we have for a future, and am I to blame if I've turned up this time as I shouldn't have been, when it was a high soprano I wanted, and deep corn curls to my bum, with womb as big as the *king*'s kettle, and a bosom so high as the bowsprit of a *fishing* schooner? (…) I've given my destiny away by garrulity, like ninety per cent of everybody else—for, no matter what I may be doing, in my heart is *the wish for children* and knitting. God, I never asked better than to boil some good man's potatoes and toss up a child for him every nine months by the calendar. (81-2, my italics)

The "androgynous wholeness" that, according to Barnes's feminist critics, antedated the codification and classification of the world into the gender-based dichotomies of mythopoetic thought, is paradoxically explicit in the mythical reinterpretation of the text. The Doctor—the man/healer/priest/king—not only wishes to be a woman, but remembers that at some point, he has been. What ails the doctor is a wish for fertility: "in my heart is the wish for children." In mythical terms, the result of the encounter between him and Nora should be the restoration of the King's reproductive capacity. But, ironically, there are a 'king' and a 'fishing' schooner in the Doctor's speech, and both images are identified with emblems of femininity: the womb and the bosom. So the (female) fertility that the Doctor wishes for—and which is expressed through analogies that refer to kingship and fishing—once again would characterize him as a Fisher King figure even if it came to fruition. There is no possible restoration for the Maimed King in *Nightwood* but, this time, such irremediable sterilization is expressed in androgynous terms, and not simply as a matter of ruined virility. As far as the Doctor is concerned, his biological masculinity seems to be the problem rather than the solution; far from wanting a cure for his impotence so as to recover his masculine vigour, he wishes he could rid himself of his maleness altogether, so that he could tolerate his sexual incapacity. The longing for the (irretrievable) male's reproductive capacity that is alleged to be the source of all forms of life, as it was established in old myth, has been overcome and replaced in Barnes's novel by a rejection of the purgative nature of such vigorous masculinity.

As it has already been explained, the mystery of the night[36] is disclosed when Nora visits the Doctor and asks the transcendental question: "Doctor, I have come to ask you tell me everything you know about the night" (Barnes 71). This moment of mythical reinterpretation, inasmuch as it explicitly appeals to the Doctor's androgynous nature and destabilizes the traditional signifier/signified dichotomies that vertebrate mythical representation, can in fact be interpreted as "the night before costumes and gender (…) of the third sex" (Gilbert 412). But what the Doctor has to say about the "third sex" that is to be found before—or after—myth (Gilbert 412)[37] is that "it contains life, but resembles the doll" (134), and the doll—Nora and Robin's inanimate, lifeless child—"resembles, but does not contain life" (134). Consequently, as Merrill Cole has argued, the "third sex" that Robin, Nora, and the Doctor incarnate "not only upsets the neat demarcations of gender and sexuality, but also the familiar sense of what it means to be alive" (394); and thus, the search for the sacred, shamanistic night of such 'third sex' (Gilbert 412) is in fact revealed as perverse and destructive.

Merrill Cole eloquently characterizes Barnes's novel as a "travesty of the truth quest [that] replaces any longed-for naturalness with prosthesis,[38] a move that ultimately allies the 'perverse' with garish spectacles of lifelessness, impotency, and inadequacy" (391). Indeed, when the Doctor comments on the 'third sex'—the beacon of pre-symbolic redemption according to traditional feminist criticism—he explicitly defines it as resembling the doll that Robin gives to Nora as a gift, the same doll that later on, Robin gives to her "mistress" Jenny (Barnes 127). This doll is possibly the most blatant symbol of sterility in *Nightwood*—"standing in for the children lesbian couples cannot have" (Cole 391)—but its meaning transcend the obvious statement about homosexuality as a sterile form of sexuality. Nora remembers, in her conversation with Doctor O'Connor:

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[36] Traditional feminist criticism has argued that *Nightwood* presents a generalized state of disease that can be redeemed, not through the return toward the strictly gender-based symbolic order of mythology, but through by means of the vindication of "the symbolic chaos" (Gilbert 415) of fluid, movable gender identities, insofar as only such chaos allows for searching "the androgynous wholeness and holiness of prehistory" (415). Such wholeness and holiness, claimed as the relief for the world's disease, is to be found in what Gilbert defines as "the night before costumes and gender, the sacred shamanistic night of what Djuna Barnes' Dr. O'Connor calls 'the third sex'" (412). Such is indeed the night that Nora asks the Doctor about.

[37] That is to say, once myth has been disassembled, i.e., *deconstructed*, through the invalidation of all the binary oppositions that articulate the mythic narrative.

[38] This is in fact the process that culminates the reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth as explored in this study, because, as it will be examined further on, the replacement of life with prosthetics is the fundamental aspect of the instances of mythical recreation found in Thomas Pynchon's novels. See pp. 384-385.

> ‘Sometimes, if she got tight by evening, I would find her standing in the middle of the room, in boy’s clothes, rocking from foot to foot, holding the doll she had given us—‘our child’—high above her head, as if she would cast it down, a look of fury on her face. And one time, about three in the morning when she came in, she was angry because for once I had not been there all the time, waiting. She picked up the doll and hurled it to the floor and put her foot on it, crushing her heel into it; and then, as I cam crying behind her, she kicked it, its china head all in dust, its skirt shivering and stiff, whirling over and over across the floor, its blue bow now over, now under.’ (Barnes 133)

The doll—in a way correlative of the ‘third sex’, in so far as the ‘third sex’ resembles the doll, hence establishing a relationship that might be understood in the terms of a metaphor—does not contain life, but it *resembles* life. However, the life that the doll stands in for is a life contaminated by violence and death: “‘we give death to a child when we give it a doll—it’s the effigy and the shroud; when a woman gives it to a woman, it is the life they cannot have” (128). Dolls are not icons of life, then, but effigies of the *absence* of life,[39] or of the life that remains in the night, emblematized by Robin’s fury and drunkenness at three in the morning, as she crushes her doll-child beneath her foot, destroying “the life they cannot have” (128). But even more so, Robin’s doll does not function independently as hers and Nora’s dummy-child, but also as the counterpoint to Robin’s real living child, Guido, born of her marriage with the Baron Felix.

THE DECONSECRATION OF MYTH

Robin—Nora’s lover and, as it can be argued, one of the shapes that the Grail adopts in Barnes’s novel—is, sometimes, a lesbian in boy clothes; an androgynous transvestite, cradling a doll-child in her chest as she rocks from foot to foot. At other times, however, she is the wife of a Viennese aristocrat of a bifurcated wing of the House of Hapsburg and curiously “damned from the waist up” (23)—an ironic pun, it seems, at the expense of the many and prominent castrated no-men of modernism (Doctor O’Connor

[39] Dolls are a rather conspicuous symbol of lifelessness and sterility in the literary tradition examined in this study. Note, e.g., Ellen Thatcher’s ineluctable transformation into “the Elliedoll” (273) in John Dos Passos’s *Manhattan Transfer* (see p. 231), or the final representation of V. in Pynchon’s homonymous novel as an inanimate automaton (see p. 385).

included) with whom, despite all ironies, the novel traces an unbreakable continuum of meaning. This continuum of meaning is actually established, among other elements in the narrative, through the child of Robin and Felix; a child that "if born to anything, had been born to holy decay. Mentally deficient, and emotionally excessive, and addict to death; at ten, barely as tall as a child of six, wearing spectacles, stumbling when he tried to run, with cold hands and anxious face" (96). Quite eloquently, in an exercise of typically modernist morbidification, the novel opposes the sterility embodied by the doll-child to the overwhelming degeneration of Baron Felix and his aristocratic linage—"'The last muscle of aristocracy is madness—remember that—' the doctor leaned forward, 'the last child born to aristocracy is sometimes an idiot, out of respect—we go up, but we come down'" (36)[40]—as the only two possible alternatives in a world thus defined by a generalized, irreparable state of destitution.

The reader meets Robin as she lies unconscious on a bed, and she is described as "surrounded by a confusion of potted plants, exotic palms and cut flowers, faintly oversung by the notes of unseen birds, which seemed to have been forgotten—left without the usual silencing cover, which, like cloaks on funeral urns, are cast over their cages at night by good housewives." (30-1) But she is no housewife, and the hotel room is not her home, but a neither public nor private space where life and death coalesce through a description that raises expectations of profuse fecundity ("potted plants, exotic palms and cut flowers") only to thwart them immediately afterwards, as if casting cloaks over bird cages, transforming them into funeral urns. As in the case of the Doctor's room, the character's chamber is also her tomb, and there she lies, apparently lifeless. Robin is immediately described as "the born somnambule, who lives in two worlds—meet of child and desperado" (31). Her flesh "was the texture of plant life" (32), yet as she rises from unconsciousness, she exclaims beside herself: "I was all right" (32); only to fall back into "the pose of her annihilation" (32). But the Doctor restores her awareness and, in that moment, as Robin wakes up, she is once again described as "a woman who is beast turning human (…) flesh that will become *myth* (…) the *infected* carrier of the past" (33, my italics). Significantly, reading this scene,

[40] As it is well know, the decadence of aristocracy is one of the most relevant topics in *The Waste* Land. What is significant about the representation of this issue in the poem is not simply the commonly-accepted presence of Countess Marie Larisch, who recalls her happy childhood "at the arch-duke's" (Eliot *TWL* 13), but the fact that she arguably speaks from the tomb, articulating the "root consciousness" (Paul Frank 43) as one of the many voices that speak from beneath the ground in "The Burial of the Dead." In this view, *The Waste Land* represents decadent aristocracy not simply as sick or degenerate, but as already dead, in a state of putrefaction, and breeding a new, perverse life that is born already swollen with death. *Nightwood* seems to continue this trend of representation.

Miriam Fuchs has argued that "O'Connor's method of restoring Robin to consciousness is reminiscent of the symbolic resurrection of Adonis. Like the god, Robin is associated with fertility. Felix knows instantly that she will one day bear his child and he is overwhelmed by the excessive moisture and fecundity that permeate Robin's bedchamber" (127). Such expectations of profuse fecundity, as already mentioned, are frustrated immediately, and, in fact, the child that Robin bears Felix is the sickly and feeble Guido, the degenerate descendant of European aristocracy. Yet, unambiguously, the identification between Robin and the deity of vegetation Adonis (Barnstone 183) seems hardly incidental, for the myth of Adonis was in its origins associated to various feminine cults of fertility,[41] that, from the perspective of Frazerian myth-ritualism, are "a key example of the myth and ritual of the dying-and-rising god of vegetation" (Segal *Myth* 67).[42] As such, Adonis was commonly represented in modernist literature as embodying varying divinities of fertility in the process of recreating the Waste Land myth. [43] So, following Fuchs, it can certainly be argued that Robin is represented as a dead-and-resurrected goddess of fertility; however, in drawing a parallel with Adonis, it must be acknowledged the subversive representation of the Greek god of fertility as a transvestite, bisexual woman who either gives birth to a son born "an addict to death" (Barnes 96), or offers dolls as children to her lesbian lovers, only to later on stomp of those dummy-children and crush them beneath her foot.[44] In Barnes's text the root of

[41] Evidence of this can be found in, for instance, some remains of Sappho's poems, such as "Death of Adonis:" "Afroditi, delicate Adonis is dying. / What should we do? / Virgins, beat your breasts, / and tear your garments" (Barnstone 10).

[42] See Frazer, chapters from XXIX to XXXIV: "The Myth of Adonis," "Adonis in Syria," "Adonis in Cyprus," "The Ritual of Adonis," and "The Garden of Adonis" (376-403). Jessie Weston also included in the myth of Adonis as an archaic version of the original ritual that eventually was developed into the Grail myth, arguing that the story of Adonis and the practices of his cult demonstrated "the cessation, or suspension, by injury or death, of the reproductive energy of the god upon whose *virile activity* vegetable life directly, and human life indirectly, depended" (Weston 44, my italics).

[43] As Eliot signals the influence of Frazer's *The Golden Bough* in his first note to *The Waste Land*, he specifies that he has "especially" used the two volumes *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, from the unabridged version (*TWL* 21). Interestingly, Eliot himself quotes from one of Sappho's poems in the poem: "At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives / Homeward, and brings the sailor home from the sea" (220-1). These lines in the third part of the poem articulate the fear of the "death by water", which in fact anticipates the drowning of the Phoenician Sailor in the fourth part. Adonis, significantly, was a Phoenician deity in origin

[44] Significantly, even when regarded from the perspective of myth critics such as Marcel Detienne or Carl Jung, who propose alternatives to Frazer's myth-ritualistic consideration of Adonis, the myth in question remains pertinent to the study of *Nightwood*, for when reappraised from a social or even psychological perspective, as Robert Segal explains, the myth of Adonis represents "the negation of practices without which the polis cannot be conceived: exogamy and reproduction" and dramatizes the consequences of rejecting those practices: barrenness and death (*Theorizing* 115). Hence the myth is revealed to be political after all (Segal *Theorizing*, 115), and thus the subversive representation of an Adonis-like figure in the character of Robin cannot be but political as well, as it in fact challenges the 'necessity' of those

fecundity is not a young, handsome virile man, who has been killed or injured; but a woman, who has not been injured, but whose reproductive incapacity cannot even be attributed to her sexual deviance, because she marries an aristocrat and bears him a child, "born to Holy Decay" (96).

Such is in the end result of the Doctor's 'resurrecting' Robin. She might be seen as the god-like source of a perverse fecundity,[45] but, as explained, the Doctor meant to resurrect her is in fact the Fisher King, a healer in desperate need of being healed himself. As Miriam Fuchs describes, all throughout the narrative the Doctor acts as "general practitioner, seer, father, confessor, psychologist, and all-around savior" (126), but his medical equipment is "rusty" and "broken" (Barnes 70), so "gradually, though, the line between the healer and the healed becomes tenuous, and the healer is forced to realize that he is no longer immune to various afflictions" (Fuchs 126):

> 'Oh,' he cried. 'A broken heart have you! I have falling arches, flying dandruff, a floating kidney, shattered nerves *and* a broken heart! Bu do I scream that an eagle has me by the balls and has dropped his oyster on my heart? Am I going forward screaming that it hurts, that my mind goes blank, or holding my guts as if they were a coil of knives? (…) Do I wail to the mountains of the trouble I have had in the valley, or to every stone of the way it broke my bones, or of every lie, how it went down into my belly and built a nest to hatch me to my death there? (Barnes 139)

After his litany of lamentations, the Doctor tries to get up on his feet, but he gives up as he keeps falling down repeatedly. He collapses eventually, going down in his last scene in a way that mirrors Robin's own collapse in the last lines of the novel. Dressed in a man's clothes, she crawls and barks in Nora's chapel, lying down in spiritual communion with Nora's dog. It is a haunting scene, but rather eloquent, insofar as the novel—like the Grail Quest itself, but also *The Waste Land*—ends in a Chapel, where Nora (the Knight) finds Robin (arguably, the Grail) and a dog. The Doctor had in fact prophesized: "Nora will leave that girl someday; but though those two were buried at opposite ends of the earth, one dog will find them both" (95). If the final scene is the

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social practices that allegedly allow the survival of the polis, disclosing such 'necessity' as the ideological scaffolding of a myth supposedly (but in truth only apparently) concerned with the cycles of nature.

[45] Identifying Robin with the source of fecundity corroborates her mythical dimension as a relatively loose incarnation of the Grail within the mythical pattern of the novel as, after all, Robin is the object pursued by Nora Flood, i.e., the Grail Knight. Yet, in myth-ritualistic terms, Adonis is analogous to Frazer's divine king, and thus could be interpreted, as the god actually operates in *The Waste Land*, as one of many referents to the mythical Fisher King. Robin is thus counterpart to the Maimed King and to the Grail, in the same way that Nora and the Doctor constantly exchange their roles as Grail Knight (healer) and Maimed King. Mythical ambivalence is thus unavoidable in the novel.

moment when the Doctor's prophecy comes true, then Nora and Robin are, somehow, already dead. Nora had always known: "there was no way but death. In death Robin would belong to her" (52).

As Winterson argues in her introduction to the novel, Nora's love and pursuing of Robin is "written without cliché or compromise in the full-blown, archetypal language of romance" (in Barnes XII), which has her "hunting faint imprints of her errant *amour*" (in Barnes XI). Such reading doubtlessly benefits a myth-critical appraisal of the novel, yet it must be addressed that the incardination of Nora's romantic quest in the romance tradition becomes horribly twisted at the end of the narrative, because, in *Nightwood*, only in death can the Knight finally reach the Chapel and find the Grail, after the King has already fallen without remedy, and there is no hope for his wasted kingdom. At the end, Doctor O'Connor realizes: 'I've not only lived my life for nothing, but I've told it for nothing—abominable among the filthy people—I know, it's all over, everything's over, and nobody knows it but me—dunk as a fiddler's bitch—lasted too long—' He tried to get to his feet, gave it up. 'Now,' he said, 'the end—mark my words—now *nothing, but wrath and weeping*!'(149). When the Doctor falls definitively, only wrath and weeping remain, signified by the barking dog—the 'Dog'[46] that finds Robin and Nora in death.

Going back to Sandra Gilbert's argument about the dismantling of myth in *Nightwood*, the encounter of Nora and Robin in the chapel could be argued to enact the primitive rites of the shamanistic night of the 'third sex' (Gilbert 412). Indeed, Robin goes down and lies with the dog wearing her boy's trousers, her androgyny/transvestism signifying the so long sought-for pre-mythic gender-free reality (Gilbert 413). In this view, Robin—part Adonis (i.e., the divine king of vegetation), part the Grail—becomes the embodiment of the "third sex" that rejects and overcomes all the gender-based binary oppositions of the symbolic thought that structured the mythical background of the character. The mythical dimension of Robin is then just an ambivalent symbolic construction that can therefore be deconstructed. As Julia Kristeva has written, "to penetrate the era, poetry had to disturb the logic that dominated the social order and do so through that logic itself, by assuming and unravelling its position, its synthesis, and hence the ideologies it controls" (83). If the discourse of myth dominates social order,

[46] The capitalization of 'Dog' is a reference to Eliot's line "Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men" (*TWL* 74), that is, the poetic voice's warning to Stetson about the possibility of the 'Dog' digging up the corpse that he has planted in his garden.

Nightwood assumes such discourse and unravels it, through the process of mythical representation and radical reinterpretation explored in this chapter. While the immediately precedent literary tradition zealously yet uselessly tried to restore the social order that allegedly preceded the disarray of modernity through the reshaping of a pre-modern myth, *Nightwood* questions the validity and *truth* of that myth *ab origine*. Barnes's novel does not simply present a modernist representation of the Waste Land myth as a myth of degeneration; it challenges the belief in its original status as a myth of regeneration that gave account of the *natural* order of the world. It destabilizes all the mythical signifiers one by one—except the Waste Land itself, which is still signified by the destitution of contemporary society.

Taking this argument into consideration, the end of the Quest presented in the novel, when the Knight, having failed to restore the King, reaches to Perilous Chapel to find the Grail barking like a dog, acquires a new meaning, for Robin refuses to "keep the Dog far hence" (Eliot *TWL* 74). Instead, she frolics with the Dog until they fall into perfect synchrony with each other. In an oddly literal sense, the Grail 'goes to the dogs,' as Robin renounces to protect the old world's remains from the Dog that, echoing from *The Waste Land*, threatens to unearth the bodies of the First World War victims and what these bodies have come to signify, that is, the old values, principles and beliefs that collapsed with the "destruction of civilization" (Bradbury and McFarlane 27) that the war entailed. But far from sheltering those remains of a destructed civilization, Robin's communion with the Dog suggests that she is actively and willingly desecrating them. Arguably, Robin—at once an 'invert' Adonis, impossible to resuscitate; and a deleterious Grail that only brings ruin to the Knight and is only attainable in death—has become the Dog herself, and so the hope for renewal and the Grail as signifier of transcendence have become their opposite: the epitome of the most impious desecration, which unearths and despoils the 'bodies' of the Old World; that is, the bodies of naturalized social order constructed symbolically in pre-modern myth and laid waste in the modern degenerate world.

CHAPTER 13

BERNARD MALAMUD'S *THE NATURAL*: REASSEMBLING MYTH

THE MYTHOLOGY OF BASEBALL

In his highly influential myth-critical essay on Bernard Malamud's *The Natural* (1952),[47] Earl Wasserman writes the following:

> Sir James Frazer, Jessie Weston, and T. S. Eliot *have transformed the significance of the Arthurian myth for the modern mind*, and their anthropological and psychological interpretations now almost necessarily invest the legend. To the twentieth century the Grail story is the archetypal fertility myth embodying, in Miss Weston's words, 'the record, more or less distorted, of an ancient Ritual, having for its ultimate object the initiation into the secret of the sources of Life.' Malamud's syncretism of baseball and the Arthurian legend therefore invites a further consideration of the novel in these terms: the psychological, moral, and communal needs of the baseball champion—the American hero—to gain access to the 'sources of Life.' (47-8, my italics)

In *The Natural*, the baseball champion embodies the mythical figure of the Grail Knight insofar as such representation conveys, in Wasserman's words, "the epic inherent in baseball as a measure of man, as it once was inherent in Homeric battles or

[47] In *King Arthur in America*, Lupack and Lupack assess that Wasserman's essay is "perhaps the most perceptive essay of all on *The Natural*" (219).

chivalric tournaments or the Arthurian quest for the Grail" (46). The protagonist, Roy Hobbs, may consequently be identified with the knight Perceval, since, like Perceval, Roy will eventually fail to complete his heroic task. Like Perceval, too, Roy's origins are obscure, and marked by the absence of his father:

> Roy laughed. 'You sound like my grandma.'
> Meme was interested. 'Weren't you brought up in an orphan's home, Roy?'
> 'I went there after grandma died.'
> 'Didn't you ever live with your mother?'
> He was suddenly thoughtful. 'Seven years.'
> 'What was she liked? Do you remember?'
> 'A whore. She spoiled my old man's life. He was a good guy but died young.' (Malamud 160).

Roy, of course, is the best hitter in the New York 'Knights' baseball team and, as any heroic chivalric prototype, he possesses a magical weapon that is both source and vehicle of the character's prowess; in this case, his bat, 'Wonderboy':

> 'Where'd you get it?' Pop asked.
> Roy cleared his throat. He said he had made it himself.
> 'Did you brand this name Wonderboy on it?'
> 'That's right.'
> 'What's it mean?'
> 'I made it long ago,' Roy said, 'when I was a kid. I wanted it to be a very good bat and that's why I gave it that name.'
> 'A bat's cheap to buy,' Red said.
> 'I know it but this tree near the river where I lived was split by lightning. I liked the wood inside of it so I cut me out a bat. Hadn't used it much until I played semi-pro ball, but I always kept it oiled with sweet oil and boned it so it wouldn't chip.'
> 'Sure is white. Did you bleach the wood?'
> 'No, that's the true colour.' (Malamud 57)[48]

Bearing in mind such mythical parallels, Wasserman explains that "baseball has given Malamud a ritualistic system that cuts across all our regional and social differences. The assimilation of the Arthurian myth defines the historical perspective,

[48] Wasserman notes that Wonderboy can be identified with a sort of modern Excalibur, or even with the mythical lance that authors such as Weston identified as a talisman of male sexual potency and reproductive capacity, since "after Roy's fruit-full night with Memo, Bump says to him, 'I hear you had a swell time, Wonderboy,' and during Roy's slump Wonderboy sags like a baloney" (Wasserman 48). The destruction of Wonderboy, split lengthwise after a foul ball during the last and definitive game to win the pennant, has fatal consequences for Roy, the first knight; but also for his teammates, the other 'Knights'; their maimed king, Pop *Fisher*; and what they all stand for: the epic of baseball as metaphor for the highest measure of man, in general, and, of course, of American contemporary society in particular.

translating baseball into the ritual man has always been compelled to perform in one shape or another" (65). Hence the Arthurian pattern that articulates Malamud's baseball novel arguably outlines a particular historical perspective over the world of baseball in the decade of 1950 that dilutes regional and social differences to present a vision of contemporary America that is comprehensive, rooted in (both ancient and, inevitably through the choice of the Waste Land myth, immediately precedent) tradition, and surprisingly pessimistic and unsettling. Avoiding the usual contrivances of allegory—manipulating a fiction so it adjusts to a pre-scripted message—Malamud's novel, as mentioned, draws from memorable real events, takes form into a story about the commonplace, typical American world of baseball, and simultaneously reveals, through a translucent reality-bound narrative, an ancient myth of heroism and longed-for regeneration. As it is pertinent to the aims of this study, it bears emphasizing the juxtaposition of a mythical pattern—identified by Malamud's critics explicitly as the pattern of the Grail Quest[49]—and a narrative that retells real and well-known events (pertained to the very specific cultural manifestation that is baseball), as it constitutes a significantly different representation of the Waste Land myth from those so far analyzed. Yet, as it will be further on explained, this new representation is functionally incardinated in a wider process of mythical reinterpretation that articulates the ideological transformations that take place from modernism into posmodernism, as far as the reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth is concerned. For the prominence of a clearly identifiable (and fairly traditional) mythical pattern in *The Natural* is in fact a necessary stage in the development of the myth that will be explored from this point onwards. At this point of this evolutionary process, however, the 'reality' of the events mythically represented in Malamud's novel is a highly relevant feature that must be addressed thoroughly and rigorously.

In quite simple terms, *The Natural* is the story of Roy Hobbs, a very talented baseball player whose career is sidetracked and, one could argue, ruined, when, at the age of nineteen, he is shot by a mysterious woman named Harriet Bird. This event is based on a true story: the strange shooting accident and later comeback of a real player, Eddie Waitkus (Theodore 20), who was shot in his hotel room by an obsessed fan on 14th June 1949. Waitkus's ordeal shocked fans across the country and "even became part of baseball folklore" (Theodore 20). Malamud's fictionalization (and in fact,

[49] See, among others, and besides Wasserman: Richman 33, or Hershinow 22.

mythologization) of Waitkus's story, then, might seem rather straightforward at first, but if analyzed from a careful myth-critical perspective, it is revealed to be remarkably complex. After all, it is surprisingly common in the American tradition to discuss baseball in terms of mythology;[50] Waitkus's story, described as "baseball folklore" by Theodore, is in fact an excellent example of this. Randy M. Torrijos explains:

> Baseball exists in two realms. One is the physical—recorded in statistics, newsreels, and old photographs. The other is the mythical—the legends passed down as folklore, the memories enhanced by nostalgic imagination, and the dramatic struggles of humans as played out by heroes in baseball novels. The physical and mythical are not, however, mutually exclusive. Baseball myth has always found its origin in some reality (no matter how slight), and the reality itself is affected by the myths that rise up as little boys and girls run onto baseball fields in hopes of becoming the next 'great one'. (196)

It hardly seems necessary to comment on the rather lax use of the word 'myth' in different forms of social and cultural discourses; yet Torrijos's consideration of the existence of baseball in a mythical realm is pertinent to the commentary on *The Natural* as it distinguishes between the *stories* of well-known baseball players—and actually stresses the importance of fictionalizing those stories so that they become "folklore"—and what seems to be the *credo* behind those stories; that is to say, the fact that baseball stories—or, even, baseball *myths*—actually give account of America's "quintessential national quest: the pursuit of the American dream" (Elias 3). More often than not, the American dream is considered itself as a myth, taking 'myth' in this case to mean "a complex of profoundly held attitudes and values which condition the way men view the world and understand their experience" (Weiss 3-4). For reasons of necessary coherence, however, this study rejects such a definition of myth, choosing to differentiate between a particular belief (in this case, the 'rag to riches' credo; that is, "the *belief* that all men, in accordance with certain rules, but exclusively by their own efforts, can make of their lives what they will" (Weiss 3, my italics)) and the stories—that is, the myths—through which that belief is expressed. Hence, following this argument, the initially tragic but ultimately heroic story of Eddie Waitkus, once become "folklore" (Theodore 20), in fact constitutes a myth that is reproduced in Bernard Malamud's novel *The Natural*.

[50] See, e.g. Bill Deane's *Baseball Myths: Debating, Debunking, and Disproving Tales from the Diamond*.

The process of mythical representation in *The Natural* is thus two-fold. Roy Hobbs represents a national mythical hero, Eddie Waitkus, but also a universal hero, the Grail Knight, who, regarded from a myth-ritualistic perspective, is the hero in charge of redeeming a community that has fallen into a state of physical and spiritual degradation. Then, the superimposition of the two myths brings about an inextricable identification between the beliefs expressed by those myths: the credo of the American dream, on the one hand; and the belief that the ultimate object of the chivalric quest in Arthurian romance is to find "the secret of the sources of Life" (Weston 203). Or, what is the same, *The Natural* identifies the American dream with a journey (as mentioned, Robert Elias defines it as "our quintessential national *quest*" (3, my italics)) in search of the sources of physical and spiritual life, through a process of mythical coalescence by means of which the real and particular world of baseball is *also* mythical and universal. Of course, in Malamud's novel, as in every text analyzed in this study, the process of mythical representation articulates a reflection on the social, economic, political and cultural specificities of the time and place when and where the novel is produced. In this case, however, the social and political dimension of *The Natural* entails an extraordinarily complex multiplicity of references.

Indeed, the 'real' references of *The Natural* are not only Eddie Waitkus and his seemingly-out-of-a-novel story, but also another 'real-life' story that challenges the celebratory ideology behind the Waikus's baseball myth: the Black Sox scandal. Roy Hobbs is thus not only the textual *referent* of two different (yet ideologically similar) mythical *references* (the baseball hero and the chivalric hero), but also of a third mythical character that—as it happen with Doctor O'Connor in *Nightwood*[51]—actually opposes the figure of Eddie Waitkus as a mythical character in baseball folklore. Undoubtedly, any perceptive reader will quickly realize that the tragically-wounded Roy, whose name unsubtly means 'king', also stands in for both the Grail Knight and the Maimed King in Malamud's novel, for this merging of the two mythical references in one single textual referent, which makes the completion of the knight's task a factual impossibility, has become a recurrent feature of the reinterpreted Waste Land myth in American novels after the 1920s. Significantly, however, this mythical ambivalence is also functional in *The Natural* in the representation of *baseball* mythology.

[51] See p. 316.

A NEW LOST EDEN

The second mythical reference from baseball folklore that Roy can be identified with is Shoeless Joe Jackson, a White Sox player accused of accepting a bribe in exchange for throwing the World Series in 1919 (Nathan 96). At the end of the novel, Roy, as Jackson, attempts to lose the game on purpose, and hence his mythical story—as an expression of the communal belief in the American dream—is radically reinterpreted, as it is transformed from the celebratory tale of a true American hero into a (seemingly) cautionary tale about corruption. Roy is simultaneously *both*, however. He is Waitkus and Jackson; the hero and the loser. The Knight and the King. Nathan explains:

> Anomalous and ambiguous, ironic and indeterminate, *The Natural* is baffling from some vantage points. But The Natural also suggests that ambiguity, irony, and indeterminacy ruled the day; the novel reflects (not unlike a carnival fun house hall of mirrors) a complex postwar social world in which moral judgements were not absolute. Although many people continue to think of the fifties as an 'innocent' era in American social history best characterized by big-finned cars, poodle skirts, and Hula Hoops, as a period when the country was lulled to sleep by prosperity, in reality the postwar years were rife with conflict and contradiction. For some it was a placid, complacent time of consumption and consensus, but it was also a time of political repression, racial segregation, and stultifying conformity. (97)

In this view, the process of mythical representation in *The Natural* arguably articulates an ambivalence that in fact characterizes the 1950s as an ambiguous and problematic era. For after 1945, despite the unconceivable horrors that mankind had caused and witnessed during World War II, the reaction to the war's end, in America, was actually euphoric (as opposed to the moral and spiritual collapse that the literature of the 1920s reflected after the end of the Great War). After World War II, a free and democratic society had triumphed over the evil forces of fascism, and America's homeland had remained intact, while the labour market prospered and the country's industrial capacity developed to reach unseen levels of production (Schwartz 1). Economic growth brought about an accelerated increase of consumption which, added to the sense of triumph after the victory over fascism, seemed to extend civilians' optimism well into the 1950s. But as Mary Caputi has argued, it is only through the rise of neo-conservatism in the 1980s that the 1950s have become an ideologically charged

narrative in American culture and politics (Caputi 3). This narrative of the decade of 1950 transcends chronology and has crystallized into an idealized and nostalgic self-definition of America, having come to signify "that robust, expansive decade announcing that good times had returned to American after wartime and deprivations" (Caputi 3). Since the 1960s and the 1970s vindicated hippie values, feminism, gay pride and multiculturalism among other unsettling social discourses (Caputi 2), distorting the neat demarcations of an allegedly clearly defined American identity, the 1950s were retrospectively transformed by the Reagan and Bush administrations into a kind, gentle, and innocent decade that was culturally portrayed as an *edenic* time of "prosperity, family, and fun" (Caputi 3).

Caputi titles her book about the 1950s in America *A Kinder, Gentler America: Melancholia and the Mythical 1950s,* using the term 'mythical' so as to mean, a 'false' or 'fabricated' conception of the 1950s. A myth-critical analysis of the 1952 novel *The Natural* demonstrates a coalescence of mythical references that articulate a sense of ambivalence and ambiguity that cannot ever be identified with a solid—let alone kind or gentle—sense of national identity.[52] For in fact the 1950s were a time of uncertainty, "an era when wartime certainties dissipated and were transformed into cold war and atomic insecurities (…) at a cultural moment still coming to grips with the Holocaust and Hiroshima, a moment when Senator Joe McCarthy was a hunting for communists, [and] the Korean War loomed large" (Nathan 97). A this time, "baseball was a preeminent symbol of American values and virtues" (97), and Malamud chose that symbol to unsettle the values and corrupt the virtues it stood for, to give form to the inescapable social tensions boiling under the surface in a novel about the national pastime, and thus ironically representing the materialistically prosperous 1950s—only mythologized as edenic in retrospect—as the moral and spiritual Waste Land that resulted after the horrors of World War II, which was of course a continuation of the post-war literary Waste Lands of modernism. Nathan elaborates:

[52] The relationship between baseball folklore and the American dream has already been explained, and it is not incidental than a very influential movie in the Reagan era is precisely Barry Levinson's optimistic film adaptation of *The Natural* (1984), which ends with Roy Hobb's Pennant-wining homerun and the completion of the Knight's heroic task of restoration. The ambiguity that is realized in the novel through the process of mythical ambivalence described in this study is, of course, utterly lost in the movie that actively contributes to the fabrication of the kind, gentle, and ideal narrative of the 1950s as both the definition and the realization of a fixed, immutable and *fake* American identity.

> By presenting readers with a radically intertextual fictional world characterized by historical and mythical allusion, tragicomedy, and irony, *The Natural* offers a richly enigmatic version of the Black Sox scandal that resists a simplified moral. Instead the event is presented in all its moral complexity and opaqueness (…) *The Natural* culls from American collective memory a story traditionally framed in terms of deceit, betrayal, and disillusionment and retells it so that readers are left with a much less unified and coherent parable than many are comfortably with. In other words, *The Natural* is productively, and perhaps deliberately, unsettling. (97)

By 'intertextual', Nathan here refers to the superimposition of baseball stories and Arthurian myth. In fact, the unsettling effects of Malamud's novel do not only arise from the ambivalent representation of Roy as both the hero Eddie Waitkus and the betrayer Joe Jackson, but, unquestionably, also from his representation as a Grail Knight that, at several moments in the narrative, becomes indistinguishable from the Maimed King he should restore to health to bring about communal regeneration. As Richard A. Schwartz argues, "Roy Hobbs fails to fulfil his promise of becoming the grail knight who will lead his team from their wasteland of losing seasons, because he allows himself to be seduced by sex and corrupted by material distractions" (154). What *The Natural* presents is then a hero who *sells* the purpose of his quest. As a baseball mythical figure, Roy embodies the principles and values of the American dream; as the Grail Knight, he is in charge of restoring the stifled sources of life so that his corrupted community can be redeemed. Yet as opposed to other failed knights figures previously explored—such as Jimmy Herf, or Jay Gatsby, or Joseph Wayne, or Nora Flood—Roy deliberately *chooses* to fail, abandoning his quest, wilfully, for a pocketful of dollars.

THE MAIMED KNIGHT

The novel begins with a mock "tourney" (Malamud 23), in the middle of an enchanted forest of "trees bent and clawing, plucked white by icy blasts from the black water, their bony branches twisting in many a broken direction" (23). At a carnival where their train stops, Walter 'the Whammer' Whambold, the leading hitter of the league, challenges Roy to strike him out, and Roy accepts. Expectedly, young Roy, only nineteen, defeats the acclaimed Whammer, in the process obtaining Harriet's favour who pointedly interprets the encounter between Roy and Whammer as "Sir Percy lancing Sir

Maldemer, or the first son (with a rock in his paw) ranged against the primitive papa" (23). Despite the obvious allusion to Perceval ("Sir Percy"), Harriet's analogy also serves to describe the "contest of skill" (Malamud 18) as a "primitive" ritualistic parricidal ceremony of succession, not unlike the one described by Frazer,[53] which, from a myth-ritualistic perspective, is believed to structurally underlie the Waste Land myth. The young vigorous successor must kill and replace the aging king before his strength falters, and so *The Natural* opens with an apparently successful rite of succession and restoration. Yet, the expectations of youthful renovation through the achievement of Roy Hobbs, the new promise of baseball, are thwarted almost immediately, for after striking out Whammer, and after being asked by Harriet about the "glorious meaning" behind baseball (25) and falling to answer appropriately, Roy watches his scout and manager, Sam, die of internal bleeding, after being struck by the last ball Roy pitched during the "tourney." Moreover, right after arriving at Chicago for his first tryout, Roy is shot in the gut by Harriet, having fallen prey to her seduction. The mythical pattern is thus suddenly altered, and it is this deviation that, as James Mellard has argued, gives the novel a tragic form, since "Roy Hobbs, older than 'Whammer' in the novel's central narrative, should not have replaced Bump, the carefree young slugger, but, baring the near-fatal wound inflicted by Harriet Bird, he should now be giving way to the younger hero" (69). But Roy's succession of Whammer, narrated in the first part of the novel under the title "Pre-Game," operates only as an introduction of what Mellard refers to as "the novel's central narrative" which, significantly, reproduces, in a larger scale, the same events of the introduction, but only after the mythical pattern has been altered so regeneration can no longer be the logical resolution.

In the central narrative, Roy is significantly older, has suffered a (symbolically) castrating wound, and is no longer in a position to replace (and relieve) an older king before the latter's strength fails and his kingdom is laid waste. Yet Roy does replace the young star of the New York Knights, Bumb Baily, who, after being humiliated by Roy's skills, loses control and runs into the outfield wall during a game, dying from the impact. The process of ritual succession is inverted as the older ailing player replaces the young skilful 'knight'; and thus, communal restoration is thwarted, even though

[53] As mentioned (p. 174), Frazer, in his description of "the killing of the divine king," specifies that one of the most common rites of succession consisted, in fact, in having the king's successor enter the latter's house and "club him to death" (310).

initially the rite seems successful. Pop Fisher, the team manager, asks Roy to play in Bump's place, and as Roy "trot[s] out" into the field, "the long rain had turned the grass green and Roy romped in it like a happy calf in its pasture" (Malamud 69). Yet, what seems like a triumphal game—"The pitchers tried something different every time he came up, sliders, sinkers, knucklers, but he swung and connected, spraying them to all fields" (70)—takes a dark turn towards the end, foreboding the tragic fate of Roy as hero and redeemer of the New York Knights:

> It happened that a woman who lived on the sixth floor of an apartment house overlooking the stadium was cleaning out her bird cage, near the end of the game, which the Knights took handily, when her canary flew out of the window and darted down across the field. Roy, who was waiting for the last out, saw something coming at him in the low rays of the sun, and leaping high, bagged it in his glove.
> He god rid of the bloody mess in the clubhouse can. (71)

The "bloody mess" that Roy discards in the clubhouse can is a very eloquent omen of the destiny that awaits both him and his team-mates. For the Knights, despite their name, are in urgent need to be redeemed, and the task falls upon Roy's shoulders, an old and wounded Grail knight. In *The Natural* as well, the profound difference between the sick and the well that Nick Carraway detected in the world no longer exists. But as opposed to other novels in which "everybody's sick" (Hemingway 13)—such as Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* or Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer*—the generalized sickness that afflicts the community is not due to the failure of ambiguously heroic figures, as the bullfighter Romero or Jimmy Herf, respectively, who were unable to complete the regeneration rites they were in charge of. In the novels analyzed in the fourth part of this study, for the most part, the traditional mythical pattern is explicitly represented and *culminated*. The Grail Knight reaches the Fisher King's castle, finds the Grail (*To a God Unknown*), ask the transcendental question seeking to unveil its meaning (*Nightwood*), and eventually inherits the King's role (*The Natural* and, even more blatantly, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*). The heroic quest is completed and the underlying rite that structures the quest fulfilled, but this fulfilment is ultimately futile because, by means of the *ambivalent* mythical representations so far described, mythical roles and meanings become undistinguishable, and the actions that should bring redemption to the sick king and to his sick kingdom are revealed as inexorably destructive.

Initially, Roy's replacement of "carefree and full of life" (101) Bump, after Bump is violently killed during a game, seems to be followed by a fruitful regeneration: "Even the weather was better, more temperate after the insulting early heat, with just enough rain to keep the grass a bright green" (78). The novel's designated Fisher-King figure, the team manager Pop *Fisher*, seems to heal miraculously: "His hands healed and so did his heart, for even during the tensest struggle he looked a picture of contentment" (79). But there is an inherent perversion in the replacement of Bump, a young baseball figure who was certainly on route to becoming a true baseball mythical hero. Roy assumes the role himself, but he is afflicted by the same symptoms that trouble Fisher and the other knights, that is, the "denizens of a modern wasteland" (Lupack and Lupack 214). For the Knights are seemingly cursed:

> It was like some kind of sickness. They threw to the wrong bases, bumped heads together in the outfield, passed each other on the baselines, sometimes batted out of order, throwing both Pop and the ump into fits, and cussed everybody else for their mistakes. It was not uncommon to see them pile three men on a bag, or behold a catcher on the opposing team, in a single skip and jump, lay the tag on two of them as they came thundering together into home plate. (62)

From a myth critical perspective, it follows that it is the King's sickness that has been transferred to his kingdom and to his people, as Pop Fisher *is* sick: "And to top if off I have to go catch athlete's foot on my hands. Now ain't that one for the books? (…) I have to go and get it on both of my hands and be itchy and bandaged in this goshdarn hot weather. No wonder I am always asking myself is live worth the living of it" (36). He suffers from "hysterical behaviour" (65), but his downfall as a baseball mythical hero seems to be a case of bad luck, a moment when he tumbled and fell on his stomach during a game. Since that moment, Fisher has believed himself to be jinxed—*cursed*, as in some medieval versions of the myth— and "he has spent twenty-five years and practically all of his pile trying to break the jinx, which he thinks he can do by making the Knights into the world champs" (51). Now Fisher, whose dream was to be a farmer—a fact that emphasizes his identification with a king figure, mystically bound to the land—is about to lose his job as manager and thus his position as king. Roy's mission is to redeem him so restoration can occur before his deposition, putting an end to the "blasted dry season" (35). But he fails, and he does so deliberately.

The identification between Roy and Fisher[54] is made evident in the fact that Roy feels that he too is jinxed[55] and, just as Fisher is sick with athlete's foot, later in the novel, Roy's "athlete heart" (168) becomes the most aggravating circumstance to his condition: a blood pressure so high that it might cause his sudden death if he keeps on playing baseball. But from the beginning, after recovering from the severe wounds inflicted by Harriet, Roy is sick: "there were days when the waiting got him. He could feel the strength draining from his bones, weakening him so he could hardly lift Wonderboy" (62). As previously mentioned,[56] Wonderboy stands in the novel as an emblem of Roy's vigour and reproductive capacity; his weakness to the extreme of not being able to "lift Wonderboy" connotes a sexual disability that, again, allows for the identification of Roy, the Knight, with the Maimed King. Not in vain, Roy falls into the worst slump of his career when he meets Memo, Bump's lover and a woman rather similar to Harriet Bird.

TWO GRAILS

Lupack and Lupack consider Memo a "false Grail" (216) that distracts Roy from his mission—the game—and the key to his success, another woman, fertile "earth-motherly" Iris (Lupack and Lupack 212), who, as even Roy himself realizes, "broke [his] jinx" (Malamud 137). But in a narrative in which the Grail Knight is at times undistinguishable from the Maimed King, both Memo and Iris could be signifiers of the Grail, because in a narrative characterized by ambivalence, the Grail as mythical signified—like the Knight, or the King—no longer has a stable meaning. In fact, the interpretation of Iris as a Grail-like source of regeneration for Roy takes for granted the assumption that it is the Knight that needs to be redeemed, and not the King. Even if supposing that by being healed, Roy would be capable of winning the Pennant for the Knights and thus of saving Fisher, to accept unquestionably that the Knight must find the Grail for *himself* means to take at face-value a rather significant change in the structure of the myth. At least, it should be recognized that needing the Grail to be

[54] Eloquently, the merging of the characters' names results in *Roy Fisher*, the Anglo-French combination of *le Roi Pècheur* (in the original sources in French) and the Fisher King.
[55] "I was just a kid and I got shit by this batty dame on the night before my tryout, and after that I just couldn't get started again. I lost my confidence and everything I did flopped" (Malamud 135).
[56] See note 48 in this chapter, p.332.

healed himself serves to identify Roy, once again, with the Maimed King, and this mythical 'multivalence' makes restoration impossible. From this it follows that even Iris, fertile and "earth-motherly," would ultimately be as futile a Grail as Memo, whose sickness—the main symptom of which is her "sick" (194) breast—signals her barrenness and incapacity to nurture.

Memo defines herself as "strictly a dead man's girl" (80)—in an affirmation, by the way, curiously reminiscent of Ellen Thatcher's "I guess I don't love anybody for long unless they're dead" (Dos Passos 310)—that yet awakens Roy's desire to the extreme that he even dreams of her sickness and feels sexually enticed by it: "That night he dreamed of her all night long. The sick breast had turned green yet he was anxious to have a feel of it" (Malamud 112). Arguably, Memo's sick *green* breast emblematically stands in as a perverse reconfiguration of the "green breast of the new world" (Fitzgerald *Gatsby*, 148), and thus *The Natural* identifies Memo as a referent to, again, two opposing references: the green breast of the new world—that is, the edenic land of plenty that America was once in mythical terms, and that it will be again after the rehabilitation of the mythical Maimed King—and Myrtle Wilson's torn breast after the climactic car accident in *The Great Gatsby*. Revisiting Tony Tanner's argument about the juxtaposition of America's green breast and Myrtle's torn breast,[57] *The Natural* then fuses Wonderland and Waste Land (Tanner 126) in one single signifier. The cyclical movement of romance, from Wonderland to Waste Land and back again to Wonderland after regeneration occurs is thus not simply interrupted, or frustrated; it is factually impossible, for both Wonderland and Waste Land are now the same ambivalent mythical space. The mythical Waste Land has been reinterpreted so that there is no outside, or alternative to it.

From this perspective, interpreting Memo as a false Grail is somehow reductionist, as it fails to acknowledge that her sick *green* breast multiplies her mythical references: she does not stand simply as the Grail, insofar as she is the object pursued by the Knight, she also stands in as the Waste Land itself. Just as Daisy Buchanan could not be straightforwardly identified with the Grail,[58] neither can Memo, simply because the Knight-like figure—who this time also is, it should not be disregarded, analogous to

[57] See p. 250.
[58] See pp. 304-305.

the Fisher King—pursues her. Yet, the analogy between Memo and Daisy is relevant,[59] for Memo seems to parallel Daisy more or less in the same way that she seems to oppose Iris. As Lupack and Lupack comment, even more so than Memo's barrenness and Iris's exorbitant fecundity,[60] both women stand as foil to one another through their symbolic involvement in automobile accidents (Lupack and Lupack 216-7). As Daisy, Memo (apparently) hits someone with her car—after an abortive attempt at lovemaking with Roy, which is frustrated when he hurts her sick breast—and refuses to take any responsibility for it; by contrast, Roy manages to hit a homerun in support of a boy injured in a car accident thanks to the inspiration and cheering of Iris during a game.[61] Nevertheless, whether Roy's homerun helps a hospitalized child to feel happy once again, such allegedly heroic deed does not undo the harm caused by Memo and, while Gatsby's actions to protect Daisy obey to his commitment to his "incorruptible dream" (Fitzgerald *Gatsby* 126), Roy actively yearns for Memo's corruption. So Roy's mission, perversely, becomes a mission of corruption. Being as sick as the King who Roy is supposed to heal determines that, rather than relieving the Maimed King and his kingdom, Roy can only contribute to spreading the sickness; and Memo—who represents the Grail, in a way, but also the terrible coalescence of Wonderland and Waste Land—stands in as the reason why Roy deliberately abandons his mission to help the Knights win the Pennant and hence save Pop Fisher, thus betraying his "pledge" (168) of heroism in exchange for the bribe that, Roy believes, will make him rich enough to be worthy of Memo's affections.

The ambivalent representation of Memo as Grail and Waste Land, at the very least, highlights the futility of the Grail as a mythical talisman of restoration. And, in fact, such affirmation can be extended to the *other* character that seems to represent the Grail in Malamud's novel: Iris. In *Nightwood*, according to Doctor O'Connor's wisdom, it is the mistake in identifying the Grail that redeems the woman "sitting through" Wagner's *Parsifal*, and not the actual presence of a surrogate Grail that is shot (the

[59] Critics have often drawn parallels between Daisy and Memo, and used them as evidence of the identification between Jay Gatsby and Roy Hobbs (see e.g., Ducharme 11).

[60] It should be noted that the fact that Iris is a grandmother at thirty-three and gets pregnant with Roy's child after only one encounter, in spite of Roy's questionable reproductive capacity, seems to reveal a rather farcical tone that might induce the reader to suspect the veracity of Irish's "earth-motherly" (Lupack and Lupack 212) nature.

[61] This action actually identifies Roy as counterpart to another Baseball mythical hero, Babe Ruth, thus exacerbating the ambivalence in the representation of the novel's protagonist as an ambiguous mythical character, who simultaneously reproduces opposing mythical figures: heroes as Babe Ruth and Waitkus, and corrupted villains who emblematize the opposite corrupted ideal such as Joe Jackson; or, identically, the redeemer Grail Knight and the wounded Fisher King.

swan), or of the actual "sanctimonious" (Campbell 430) Grail (the chalice) in the opera, which, it must be noted, is nothing but yet another *representation*. Redemption—of a kind—is found in realizing the ambiguity of *all* the Grail representations as unreliable signifiers, which eventually leads to realizing the ambivalence of the Grail itself as mythical signified; that is, the invalidity of its allegedly natural and supposedly universal significance as a source of life and restoration. In *The Natural*, however, Roy's refusal to accept such ambivalence and his determination to choose between Memo and Irish characterize him as a figure out of his time and, in the end, determine his heroic failure. He chooses Irish when he learns that she is pregnant, but by then, it is too late. Iris might be earthly and extraordinary fecund, but at the end of the novel, she is being carried to the hospital in an ambulance, after Roy has hit her with the ball during the game, and she has gone "soundlessly down" (194). Iris's recovery is uncertain, but her ambivalence as a Grail figure is not limited to the fact that, in the end, when the Knight arguably finds her, he *damages* her. Raped when she was "just out of childhood" (129), she is drawn to Roy because she (mistakenly) sees a true hero in him. Rather than being found by the Knight, Iris actively pursues Roy, who is largely dismissive of her. Iris believes that "without heroes we're all plain people and don't know how far we can go (…) [because] it's their function to be the best and for the rest of us to understand what they represent and guide ourselves accordingly" (133); and Roy believes that Iris broke his curse: "Up at the plate I was blind as a bat and Wonderboy had the heebie jeebies. But when you stood up and I saw you with that red dress on and through to myself she is with me even if nobody else is, it broke the whammy" (133). Yet their beliefs are not as in synchrony as it might initially seem. He wants to break all the records that ever existed simply to break them, to be the best in the game; and she recognizes the emptiness beneath such a purpose. Still, they go swimming naked in the freezing waters of Lake Michigan; but what seems initially like an obvious contrast to the stagnant pond that Roy visits with Memo—"DANGER. POLLUTED WATER. NO SWIMMING" (100)—is progressively (and perversely) transformed; first, when Iris has to repeatedly escape Roy's advances, shoving him away and feeling "repelled" (138); and, finally, when, after Iris's rejection, Roy's death drive overwhelms him and he starts swimming for the bottom of the lake, getting close to drowning. The threat of 'death by water' looms over Roy's supposedly regenerative encounter with Iris and it does so in a way that appeals to the vanity of Roy's mission. Iris wonders why Roy had gone down: "Did he touch the bottom of the lake out of

pride, because he wants to make records, or did he do it in disappointment, because I wouldn't let him kiss me?" (140). Iris's kiss is thus set to contrast Roy's vanity and purposelessness, yet when she stops resisting his seduction, and "her breasts beat like hearts against him" (140), their lovemaking, although not thwarted as between Roy and Memo, certainly connotes a sense of repressed violence and frustration that hinders the sought-for regeneration that the Knight finding the Grail should have brought about:

> He smiles, never so relaxed in sex.
> But while he was in the middle of loving her she spoke: 'I forgot to tell you I am a grandmother.'
> He stopped. Holy Jesus.
> Then she remembered something else and tried, in *fright*, to raise herself.
> 'Roy, are you—'
> But he shoved her back and went on from where he had left off. (140, my italics)

"Holy Jesus" is also Roy's reaction to learning that Iris is pregnant—the circumstance that, it seems more than plausible, Iris tries to avoid when she suddenly remembers something and tries to pull away, thus obviously intending, despite her "earth-motherly" condition, for their intercourse to be purposely sterile. She gets pregnant, nonetheless, in spite of her "fright", as he "shove[s] her back and [goes] on from where he had left off" (140). The regenerative reading is, at least, problematic, if not downright inaccurate. For the verification of Iris's fecundity during the final game—after Roy throws the game, and hits her in the face while deliberately fouling as he aims to hit an unhappy fan who criticises him from the audience—does not result in Roy's redemption, or in the recovery of the prowess that would allow him a chance at winning the game, the Pennant, and thus at restoring Fisher's health and the welfare of the community.

THE KNIGHT'S FAILURE

The night before the final and decisive game, Roy attends a party hosted by Memo, during which he compulsively eats large amounts of food, trying to satiate an inexplicable hunger, until he collapses and wakes up, later, at the hospital. As John W. Petty argues, one significant problem that leads to Roy Hobbs's ruin is his "chronic dissatisfaction, his tendency to want something even as he is having it, which applies to

his voracious appetite, his burning desire to rewrite the Major League record books, and (...) his unfulfilling choices regarding sex" (36). In this view, Roy's gluttonous appetite is a correlative of his frustrated sexuality and the vanity behind his determination to break records for no reason except to break them—two aspects of Roy's personality symbolically represented through an episode in which the character was confronted with the possibility of death by drowning. Added to these two characteristics—Roy's vain mission and his thwarted sexuality, symbolically codified into the threat of death by water—Roy's knightly vigil before the final game introduces a voracious yet insatiable appetite that is not only sickening and ultimately destructive, but that it is actually expressed in terms that not only emphasize the contrast between Roy's overindulgent gluttony and the traditional Grail Knight's fasting (Lupack and Lupack 212), but also highlight the debauchery of Roy's feasting:

> The hamburgers looked like six dead birds. He took up the first one and gobbled it down. It was warm but dry. No more dead birds, he thought… not without ketchup. He poured a blop on three of the birds. Then he shuffled them up with the other two so as not to know which three had the ketchup and which two hadn't. Eating them, he could not tell the difference except that they all tasted like dead birds. They were not satisfying but the milk was. He made a mental note to drink more milk. (Malamud 164)

What begins as a simile—"the hamburgers looked like six dead birds"—is transformed into a complete identification—"He poured a blop on three of the birds"—that eloquently recovers the symbol that illustrated Roy's start as the Knights' champion: the bird Roy crushes in his hand by accident during his first game after he replaced Bump. The insistence on the blop of ketchup—"America's national condiment"[62] so much as baseball is American's 'national pastime'—uncannily recalls the "bloody mess" (Malamud 71), thus establishing a symbolic continuum between Roy's seemingly heroic and restorative first game and his failure during the last game, when ominous signs such as crushing a bird in his hand during a triumphant game have given way to explicit references that identify Roy as a Maimed-King figure. For the overwhelming hunger Roy feels during Memo's party is, as already mentioned, an expression of his frustrated sexual desire, and thus a sign of the character's impotence.[63]

[62] See Smith, Andrew F. *Pure Ketchup. A History of America's National Condiment. With Recipes*.
[63] Trying to understand his dissatisfaction, Roy "trie[s] hard to recapture how it felt when he was hungry after a day of *fishing* and was sizzling lake bass over an open fire and boiling coffee in a tin can" (163, my italics).

After his indigestion, he dreams of "rous[ing] himself to do battle" (164), but he can barely move: "he lived a pain he could not believe existed. Agonized at the extent of it" (165); and, at last, unconsciousness overtakes him: "In the distance though quite near, a toilet flushed, and though the hero braced himself against it, *a rush of dirty water got a good grip and sucked him under*" (165, my italics). Being flushed down the toilet may seem like a rather sardonic kind of death by water, but the imagery is as eloquent as Madame Sosostris's warning, or the Flood foreboded in Ellen Thatcher's song; and, even more importantly, it connects Roy's failure at the game with his sexual encounter with Irish, thus undercutting the supposedly "redeeming fecundity of the true Grail" (Lupack and Lupack 216) that some critics attribute to Iris.

Roy's bellyful of "dead birds" and subsequent visit to the hospital reveal that, as previously commented, he is afflicted by a severe blood pressure condition that might kill him if he continues playing baseball. As Pop Fisher, he is unable to go on playing but, unlike Fisher, he decides to renounce his mission altogether, accepting the bribe of the team's owner and agreeing to throw the game, believing that, if he abandons his promise to redeem the Knights and instead obtains financial security, he will be able to finally earn Memo's affection. After learning that Iris is pregnant, however, Roy repents and changes his mind, deciding to play his best regardless of his agreement with Memo and the team's owner. But despite his best efforts, he is too sick to play. He feels as if he is dying (Malamud 199) and, after Wonderboy is split lengthwise after Roy hits a foul ball—an accident that arguably signifies Roy's definitive castration and thus marks his irreversible transformation from the Grail Knight into the Fisher King[64]—he impotently "fail[s] to lift the bat" (197). Roy's malady is significantly similar to the mythical Maimed King's crotch injury: "Roy's armpits were creepy with sweat. He felt a bulk of heaviness around his middle, and that the individual hairs on his legs and chest were bristling" (202). He can do nothing to hit the ball. He strikes out and, after the game, buries Wonderboy—the emblem of his reproductive capacity—"wishing it would take root and become a tree" (204). But he knows the futility of his wish: "At the fountain he considered whether to carry out a few handfuls of water to wet the earth above Wonderboy but they would only leak through his fingers before he got there, and

[64] Lupack and Lupack note: "only when [Roy] corrupts the ideal for which Wonderboy stands by trying to foul out in the final game—a particularly passive and cowardly way of keeping his bargain with the Judge—does it lose its magic and break irreparably into several pieces" (215).

since he doubted he could find the exact spot in the dark he went down the dug-out steps and into the tunnel" (204).

"He could have been a king" (206), a woman says of Roy. He *should* have been a king, and in a way (the *wrong* way) he was. Following Campbell's elucidation of the Grail myth, Roy's task as Grail Knight was to inherit the Fisher King's role as king, without inheriting the wound (Campbell 430). The process of mythical reinterpretation in *The Natural*, however, repeatedly introduces variations in the mythical pattern while representing the characters as ambivalent referents that appeal to multiple mythical references, thus frustrating any chance of a successful mythical—and hence *ritual*—succession. Roy not only fails to restore the Fisher King and the Waste Land, but also inherits the mystical wound, destroying any hope of restoration for the novel's irreparably blighted community; that is, the America of the allegedly kind and gentle 1950s.

The superimposition of baseball and Arthurian legend throughout the novel as juxtaposing and superimposing mythical references allows for a clear-cut identification between the Knights' plight, "their wasteland of losing seasons" (Schwartz 154), and contemporary America. As Carino argues, "baseball history works to inscribe the novel with a realistic strain that locates it in the modern world, where money and human weakness tend to triumph over heroism" (75); simultaneously, the Arthurian myth of the Waste Land, once reinterpreted, gives account of the social, cultural and ideological context that is localized and circumscribed through Baseball history. But far from operating as two separated systems of references, Arthurian myth and baseball mythology are inextricable, since *The Natural* does not represent stories from baseball folklore independently, but fully integrated in the narrative pattern of the reinterpreted Waste Land myth. Roy Fisher might be identified with Eddie Waitkus insofar as he is the Grail Knight counterpart, and he stands in for the Fisher King so far as he may be identified with Shoeless Joe Jackson. The simultaneity of references, in fact, is another form of the "anthropological temper" that, as Michael Levenson explained, characterized *The Waste Land* through Eliot's "attempt to bring diverse cultural contexts into satisfactory relationship" (202). This anthropological temper "understands by comparing, (…) sets systems of belief in relation to one another, and (...) disallows the special claims of any single system" (Levenson 202). So in *The Natural*, baseball as an inherently American cultural manifestation is compared and set in relationship to Arthurian myth, and this circumstance triggers a remarkably complex process of

mythical representation and reinterpretation that, first, recaptures the mythical parameters of America's pre-war—or rather, *inter*-war—literary tradition, and, second, connects it securely (to bring such tradition up to date) with the most popular mythical corpus of its time: the stories of baseball folklore that occupied the collective imagination during the decade of 1950. The result is a "reshaped" legend (Lupack and Lupack 211) that examines contemporary life and denounces the emptiness of values at the dawn of consumer capitalism, in a commodified society that used consumerism and the shining superficiality of economic prosperity to masquerade the underlying horror that hid at the root of such buoyancy: the unforeseen violence of World Wart II, and the political repression, racial segregation, mindless conformity, and social inequalities that tenuously supported the complacency and docility of the consumption era. Critics such as Schwartz have claimed that, "read as a metaphor for the nation as large, [*The Natural*] further suggests that the United States might easily possess the resources and talent to lead the world out of its postwar waste land but is instead squandering that potential on superficial attractions" (154). Yet, the complex process of *ambivalent* mythical representation in Malamud's novel seems to demonstrate that, arguably, Roy's failure is not simply due to his squandered potential, but to an immanent corruption of such potential that denies him any chance to "lead the world out of its waste land," as his materialism and greed are in fact symptoms of that collective affliction that he cannot thus relieve.

The problem of the commodified and complacent America of the 1950s is not one of squandered potential, when analyzed from how it is represented through mythical reinterpretation in novels such as *The Natural*, and those analyzed in the next two chapters of this study. America does not fail in its (self-imposed) mission[65] to restore the Waste Land that is the rest of the world after World War II, because it overindulges in consumerism and passivity. America—represented in *The Natural* quite explicitly through the heroic myths of Baseball—cannot save the world because the United States (clearly from the 1920s onward) has been transformed, at least as far as it concerns its representation in American literature, into a mythical Waste Land, as corrupted and swollen with death as the Old Europe recreated in *The Waste Land*. The aftermath of the horrors caused and witnesses during World War II and the escalating tension and violence of the Cold War that followed in subsequent decades are not represented in the

[65] See Schwartz's *The 1950s*. Chapter 2: "America Becomes the World's Policeman: 1950." Pp: 45-90

American novel after 1950 as a matter of wasted potential for heroism, but as a generalized state of unredeemable social, cultural and political putrefaction from which there is no longer an outside or any possible alternative, for after World War II, there is no longer a Wonderland waiting to be recovered at the far end of the Waste Land. There is *only* the Waste Land left.

CHAPTER 14

KEN KESEY'S *ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST*: LITERALIZATION AND MYTHICAL RE-CREATION

THE IMAGE OF THE WASTE LAND

In their chapter devoted to the analysis of Arthurian motifs in contemporary American novels, Lupack and Lupack relate Bernard Malamud's *The Natural* to Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962) by arguing that whereas Malamud's novel tells "a tale of a contemporary knight errant whose greed and selfish ambition prevent him from redeeming Pop Fisher and restoring the wasteland" (221), Ken Kesey's first novel "is the story of a decidedly unconventional Grail knight who sacrifices himself for a group of wastelanders, the inmates of mental ward" (221). As it was explained in the previous chapter, the reasons preventing Roy Hobb's success in restoring the Knights' Waste Land went a little further than the character's greed and selfishness, as they were in fact rooted in the complex and ambivalent process of mythical reinterpretation that Roy himself embodied, by reproducing the contradicting mythemes of Grail Knight and Fisher King, and thus standing in for contradictory ideals. Nevertheless, Lupack and Lupack's oversimplification of Roy's failure in Malamud's novel is convenient insofar as it presents Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* as the ideological opposite of *The Natural*, as far as the reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth is concerned. As Lupack and Lupack claim, where Roy fails, McMurphy (apparently) succeeds: as the

protagonist, McMurphy, the "Grail knight figure" (221), "saves the men from being swallowed up in the institution's technological horror and anonymity. He makes them aware of their own manhood (…) and restores their individual and collective potency so that they can assert their own identities and oppose Big Nurse's mindless regimen" (221).

Lupack and Lupack's interpretation of Kesey's novel, on the basis of its mythical dimension, seems to reaffirm Raymond M. Olderman's consideration pertaining to the tenuous but resistant "optimism" of the American novel during 1960s, an optimism that he describes as "to start caught in a waste land like an insane asylum, a jail, or a full state of deadened feeling, as so many recent novels do—and struggle toward overcoming that state" (9). There is certainly a struggle to overcome a state of "deadened feeling" in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*; however, from the perspective of this study, the representation of the Waste Land myth in Kesey's novel offers little room for optimism. But Olderman's argument that the waste land is the "controlling metaphor" of the American novel in the decade of 1960 is evidently highly pertinent for the hypothesis advanced in this chapter, even when Olderman does not link the pervasiveness of what he calls the "image of the waste land" (10) to the immediately precedent literary tradition.[66] Yet his detailed explanation on how the waste land image operates in twentieth-century American literature, and specifically in the 1960s, is extraordinarily lucid and eloquent:

> In the waste land all energies are inverted and result in death and destruction instead of live, renewal, or fulfilment. Water, a symbol of fertility in a normal land, is feared, for it causes death by drowning instead of life and growth. Wastelanders are characterizes by enervating and neurotic pettiness, physical and spiritual sterility and debilitation, and inability to love, yearning and fear-ridden desires. They're sexually inadequate, divided by guilts, alienated, aimless, bored, and rootless; they long for escape and for death. They are immersed in mercantilism and materialism; their lives are vain, artificial, and pointless. Close to being inert,[67] they are helpless in the face of a total disintegration of values.

[66] Olderman barely notes the coincidence in terms of symbolic imagery between the novels of the nineteen-sixties and *The Great Gatsby*, which he considers "the first novel to see the potential aptness of the image of the waste land for the novel of modern times" (10). As this study has argued, the wasteland imagery in *The Great Gatsby* is neither an isolated case, nor an arbitrary symbolic choice, but in fact realizes a process of mythical representation and reinterpretation that has successively given account of the social, cultural, and political anxieties of "modern times" as it concerns contemporary American society, a process of which the novel of the nineteen-sixties still partakes, and that is in fact rooted in the well-established tradition of recovering and reshaping romance and romance mythology analysed throughout this study.

[67] Literal inertness is, in fact, the final and irreparable state that afflicts the Waste Land and its inhabitants. It is the point of no return; and, as it will be examined in the next (and last) chapter of this

> Life constantly leads to a reduction of all human dignity; the wastelander becomes idealess and hopeless as he falls prey to false prophets. (11-2)

As Olderman perceptively suggests, the image of the waste land as extensively elaborated on the previous quote is actually a critical tool (11) employed to approach and dissect, in the case of his study, the literature of the 1960s. This chapter however broadens the scope to analyze not simply the resulting wasteland imagery, but in fact the process of mythical representation and reinterpretation that brings about such bleak imagery, once again reshaping the original pre-modern myth to symbolically articulate the concerns of Kesey's social and cultural context; that is to say, the social and cultural concerns of literary postmodernism. The next chapter will focus on the significance of the Waste Land as a mythical space after the "so-called crisis of representation;"[68] this chapter, however, by analyzing the well-known process of mythical recreation in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, seeks to examine the culmination of the gradual process of reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth in the literature of the United States after the 'wasteland novels' of the 1920s. For, as Gaile McGregor has argued, it is through "its fairly conventional treatment of the wasteland theme" that Kesey's novel "provides an *almost classic* expression of the world vision we have already shown to dominate twentieth-century modes of self-imaging" (194, my italics). These modes of self-imaging are often expressed through the already-mentioned wasteland imagery, which, as it pertains to the novel of the 1960s, can be explained as follows:

> Novel after novel attempts somehow to catch an image of the modern world in some distinctive form of waste land that allows us to contemplate its landscape and learn some way to cope with it. For writers born in the years of the Depression, or raised in and under the shadow of World War II, the image of a promised land has lost its creative potential. Most of us are no longer bred on the kind of purely innocent hope that is destined to end in disillusionment. We are an age weaned on tension and silent despair. (Olderman 8-9)

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study, it is also the final state in the degenerative process of representation of the Waste Land myth that this thesis has explored.

[68] As Jameson famously explains in his well-known "Foreword" to Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*, the "so-called crisis of representation" is the crisis of "an essentially realistic epistemology, which conceives of representation as the reproduction, for subjectivity, of an objectivity that lies outside it" (qt. in Herman 161). As it will be explained already in this chapter, in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, the representation of the Waste Land myth is not, at last, understood as the subjective reproduction of an objective truth to be found outside of its representation. This, no doubt, may be intuited through the myth-critical interpretation of a text that, as explored in this study, represents the mode of romance as self-conscious, fabricated, artificial and ideologically conditioned.

In this way, the image of the waste land in the 1960s is significantly different from how it was in the previous decades. As Olderman notes, the Promised Land as a foundational American ideal has lost its creative possibilities, even those exploited by the mourning for its loss. The irretrievable degeneration of the Promised Land into a Waste Land has been certified after decades of literary representation, so what remains in the sixties is an overwhelming sense of "deadened feeling", and barely the struggle to overcome it. But the struggle is slowly being revealed as inevitably futile and, it will become, as it will be explored in the next chapter, actively (self-)destructive. In *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, however, the hero's dream is not, yet, the Pynchonian "dream of annihilation" (*V.* 206); on the contrary, the mythical pattern allows for a glimmer of (false) hope for restoration, insofar as, at least, the alleged hero is unaware of the fact that his ordeal is, in fact, hopeless.

THE VICTIMS OF MATRIARCHY

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest is the story of two men, Randle Patrick McMurphy, a lustful, violent gambler who feigns insanity to avoid prison, and 'Chief' Bromden, a gigantic but terrorized half-Native American schizophrenic inmate who pretends to be deaf and dumb to remain isolated from all forms of human contact. McMurphy's arrival at the mental ward at the beginning of the novel revolutionizes the lives of the tranquilized inmates, as he begins to antagonize the head administrative nurse, Mildred Ratched (often referred to as 'Big Nurse'), who, upon McMurphy's immediate judgement is deemed a "ball-cutter" (Kesey 51), that is, a victimizer of 'her' male patients who have thus become, in the words of the repressed homosexual inmate Dale Harding, "the victims of a matriarchy" (54). In Leslie Fiedler's celebrated argument, Kesey's novel therefore retells "the old, old fable of the White outcast and the noble Red Man joined together against home and mother, against the female world of civilization" (246):

> 'Our dear Miss Ratched? Our sweet, smiling, tender angel of mercy, Mother Ratched, a ball-cutter? Why, friend, that's *most* unlikely.'

> ‘Buddy, don’t give me that tender little mother crap. She may be a mother, but she’s big as a damn barn and tough as knife metal. She fooled me with that kindly little old mother bit for maybe three minutes when I came in this morning, but no later (…) she’s a bitch and a buzzard and a ball-cutter, and don’t kid me, you know what I’m talking about. (Kesey 52)

Nurse Ratched is a “mother” but as such, she comes to represent an emasculating and homogenizing civilization that the hero must combat to protect his individual liberties. The novel thus has been interpreted as an “archetypal Western” (Fiedler 247) in which madness is presented as “[a] possibility of White transcendence” (247). Following Fiedler’s view, criticism on the novel has traditionally argued that McMurphy is in fact “the central figure of a romance” (Barsness 421) which is not exactly a traditional *medieval* romance, but a truly American western—yet, as Fiedler claims, *archetypal*—where “the enemy [the hero] fights his society, artificial, complex, institutionalized (…) [because] oppressive, conformist, regulatory, civilization is the suppressor of individual freedom and the mindless slave of a material goal” (421). As Andrew Foley explains, at least on one level Kesey’s text allows for a literal reading that regards the novel as a “depiction and denunciation of the continuing inhumanity of the conditions and methods of treatment in mental hospitals at the time” (40). Of course, the mental hospital operates as a microcosm of contemporary society, as it is one manifestation of a global power system which, as Jennings explains, functions as the blinding, anesthetising fog that Chief Bromden hallucinates: “if you can see it, you are diagnosable within its categories and may be singled out for special measures of control.” (Jennings 16-17)

This socio-political interpretation of the novel is perfectly compatible with Leslie Fiedler’s hypothesis about McMurphy and Chief Bromden interracial bond in their fight against a civilization, which is ideologically codified, in feminine terms. As a matter of fact, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* is the narrative of a group of men who have been supposedly victimized by matriarchy, inasmuch as matriarchy might be understood as the correlative of a repressive, mechanized form of civilization that suppress the vital impulses and sexual energies of men; that is to say, a repressive, dehumanizing form of civilization that is codified as a form of generalized castration, the symptoms of which are the different inmates’ sexual pathologies. Foley explains:

> One important contention in the novel is that the widespread, enforced moral conformism in American society had produced a high degree of sexual repression

> and intolerance and, consequently, contributed to a variety of individual psychological problems. It is significant that many of the men have come to the ward for mental disturbances which are sexual in origin: Harding's feelings of inadequacy and his shame at being 'different'; Billy Bibbit's intense inhibition as a result of a form of Oedipal complex; Fredrickson and Sefelt's closet homosexuality. More symbolically, there are the terrible figures of Ruckly, whose whole sexual identity has been reduced to one agonised exclamation of *'Ffffffuck da wife'* and Rawler the Squawler whose inarticulate sexual horror meant that he finally 'cut both nuts off and bled to death' (p. 121). The patients' sexual dysfunctionality serves as one particular focus of an entire society gone wrong. (42)

As in other texts previously examined in this study, sexual dysfunctionality is the observable pathology that characterizes the universal malady of contemporary society in a narrative that is effectively articulated upon the mythical pattern of the Waste Land. Once again, quoting Foley, "just as T. S. Eliot in *The Waste Land* had used the legend of the Fisher King as part of his 'mythic method' to reveal the spiritual sterility and cultural stagnation of post World War I Europe, so Kesey adopts and adapts the legend to register the condition of America in the early 1960s as a waste land of social conformity and oppression" (46). Following this argument, the aim of this chapter is to explore the variants in the representation of the myth that are introduced in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*—which in fact constitute the first instance of 'postmodern' reinterpretation of the Waste Land 'metanarrative'—by challenging long-established interpretations of the mythical dimension of Kesey's novel, which have conventionally taken the novel's reutilization of the Waste Land myth at face-value, and very rarely in relation to its literary predecessors.

Arthurian expert Barbara Tepa Lupack clearly identifies the two main characters of Kesey's novel with two corresponding mythical counterparts, arguing that Chief Bromden stands in for the Fisher King, while McMuprhy represents the Grail Knight. As the Fisher King in Chretien de Troyes' original romance, Chief Bromden was wounded in a battle (he is a World War II veteran) and, in spite of his imposing physicality, has been terrorized—by his interactions with the business world of white men, by war, and by the dehumanizing treatments under Nurse Ratched's care—into becoming powerless and paralyzed. He clings permanently to his broom, "virtually his only moving appendage" (Lupack 67), which symbolically "functions as a pathetic

reminder of his lost potency, as a cruel linguistic corruption of his name and identity,[69] and as a travesty of the quondam symbols of his royal sceptre, or lance, or even perhaps fishing spear" (Foley 46). For Chief Bromden is a *fisher* king before he is injured/goes mad, as he is a true chief—or rather, the true descendant of a chief[70]—of a Columbia River tribe, the 'fish Injuns'. But after his traumatizing experiences in war, first, and in the mental hospital, later, Chief Bromden becomes a *different* kind of Fisher King, as his sickness progresses into a state of rootlessness that disconnects him from his origins: he can no longer fish, for he has grown afraid of water, unsurprisingly since, once again after Madame Sosostris's apocalyptic warning, "water, a symbol of fertility in a normal land, is feared [in the Waste Land], for it causes death by drowning instead of life and growth" (Olderman 11).[71]

Chief Bromdem, of a fishing tribe, now fears death by water, so as it also happened to Jake Barnes,[72] Chief Bromden is a Fisher King figure who cannot even "relax or (…) go out to enjoy himself" (Troyes 424) by fishing. There is no repose for him, and yet, one of the most celebrated episodes in the novel, seemingly an undoubted triumph of McMurphy in his mission to rehabilitate the inmates is, curiously, a *fishing* trip. But the fishing trip that McMurphy organizes for the inmates and two prostitutes from Portland who are, in fact, "part of [their] cure" (Kesey 189), is an adventure of deep-sea fishing, "where men are men and boats are boats" (161). It is a riskier, truer, and definitely more invigorating escapade than the quiet, passive exercise of the mythical Maimed King (and of Jake Barnes[73]), who sit on a boat or a log, disabled and immobile. Deep-sea fishing, on the contrary, is portrayed through Dr. Spivey's extenuating but successful struggle to capture a big flounder, "his monster from the

[69] He is often called 'Chief Broom', which establishes the symbol of his impotence, the broom, as the only designator of the character's identity.

[70] Bromden's dad was the leader of his tribe, but he married a white woman from the town nearby who eventually "made him too little to fight" (Kesey 171). The story of a king who marries a 'foreigner' and pays the price with both his strength and his kingdom, may recur along the literary tradition that represents the Waste Land myth, as it is the plot of the Irish echtra *Adventure of Art Son of Conn*, which, according to Loomis, as explained in the introduction (see p. 7) contains one of the prototypes of the Waste Land motif (Loomis 223).

[71] Death by water is explicitly present in the novel when an inmate, Charles Cheswick, commits suicide by sticking his fingers in the grate over the drain of the swimming pool. McMurphy tries to save him, but fails to unhinge the grate in time.

[72] See p. 273.

[73] The references to Ernest Hemingway in the episode are made explicit when McMurphy reproaches to another inmate: "Hell, George, why didn't you say you were a fisherman? I been talking up this voyage like I was the Old Man of the Sea" (Kesey 177). Meaningfully, the reference to Hemingway's 1952 novella perpetuates the opposing dialectic between the regenerative deep-sea fishing of Santiago in *The Old Man and the Sea* (a true revitalizing adventure) and the inactive, frustrating river fishing of Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises* (see p. 273).

deep" (195) as a triumph which, in turn, gives him the strength to confront Nurse Ratched and break free from his previous submission to her. Thus, weakened, 'castrated' men are finally empowered through their experience of the natural world, which is then visibly opposed to the feminine, civilized world emblematized by the mental hospital and the belittling treatments of Nurse Ratched.

But it must be noted that, from Chief Bromden's paranoid-schizoid point of view, Nurse Ratched is not simply a cruel, dehumanized "ball-cutter;" she is a prominent agent of what he calls the 'Combine', a global, mechanized system that controls—technologically, from the electronic panel of the nurses' switchboard—the whole of society: "McMurphy doesn't know it, but he's onto what I realized a long time back, that it's not just the Big Nurse by herself, but it's the whole Combine, the nation-wide Combine that's the really big force, and the nurse is just a high-ranking official for them" (148). Ironically, and perversely, the machinery that standardizes all life in Kesey's Waste Land is named after a harvester, which does not plough the land to optimize its fertility, but simply evokes the image of a gigantic, mechanized monster "cutting its relentless swath through a field, levelling grain, flowers, small trapped animals, and processing each unit of its yield into a uniform, socially useful form" (McGregor 194).[74] But this uniformed and dehumanized life has spread out of the mental hospital, demonstrating that not only the psychiatric ward is a sort of metaphorical wasteland, but the entire society is represented as a mythical Waste Land, as the lifelessness that Chief Bromden observes outside of the mental hospital is in fact the same unreal, fabricated, and cardboard existence that the inmates endure in Nurse Ratched's ward:

> All up the coast I could see the signs of what the Combine had accomplished since I was last through this country, things like, for example—a *train* stopping at a station and laying a string of full-grown men in mirrored suits and machined hats, laying them like a hatch of identical insects, half-life things coming pht-pht-pht out of the last car, then hooting its electric whistle and moving on down the *spoiled land* to deposit another hatch. (Kesey, 186-187, my italics)[75]

[74] This description of a *processed* life in the Waste Land clearly resonates with the echoes of previously explored texts, such as, most clearly, John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer*, which, as examined, opens with a crowd of undistinguishable men and women "press[ing] through the manuresmelling wooden tunnel of the ferry-house, crushed and jostling like apples fed down a chute into a press" (Dos Passos 15).
[75] Note the similarities between this description and Jimmy Herf's epiphany at his uncle's office building in downtown Manhattan (see p. 235).

The train in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* has replaced the ferry of *Manhattan Transfer*, laying crowds of identical men and women, as if mass-produced, to be systematically grinded and processed by the all-encompassing machinery that controls all forms of life in the mechanized Waste Land. But the imagery in Kesey's novel is more perverse, as the mechanical train is made alive, but metaphorically identified with a pest, *infecting* the land with larvae. The mechanizing, dehumanizing forces of contemporary life are thus explicitly depicted as the cause to the *wasting* of the land, consequently drawing attention to the mythical substrate of the novel. For the mechanized, *wasted* land, where men are the infected larvae of a pest, is the mythical Waste Land that the novel's Grail Knight, Randle McMurphy, must arguably restore to its original, pre-civilized, male-driven prosperity.

INCREDULITY TOWARDS MYTH

McMurphy's mission of restoration—which turns out to be much more deleterious than actually restorative, despite appearances—is considered by Daniel J. Vitkus as a "sexual battle" in which McMurphy "becomes a kind of sexual savior, come to restore [the inmates'] collective virility" (78). Extremely critical towards the novel's "purely masculinist" (83)—and accordingly misogynist—perspective, Vaitkus denounces the use of "archetypal romance myth" (83) to justify, or rather, to *naturalize*[76] sexual violence against women. Attempting a myth-critical approach, Vaitkus identifies McMurphy with the legendary Fisher King (78) and, even though his argument about McMurphy's "sexual energy and life-restoring power" (79) seems to directly contradict the previously stated identification, Vaitkus's seemingly mistaken observation that McMurphy is, as a matter of fact, a Fisher-King figure serves to, at least, challenge the clear-cut identification—that is, Chief Bromden is the unquestionable counterpart of the mythical Fisher King, and McMurphy represents the Grail Knight—that most of Kesey's critics prefer. As it has been a constant in the myth-critical reading undertaken in the fourth part of this study, as the distance between the sick and the well progressively and ineluctably disappears, [77] an unambiguous mythical representation is

[76] See p. 316.
[77] It should be remembered that McMurphy is not (said to be) actually sick. He *pretends* to be mentally insane (similarly to how Chief Bromden pretends to be deaf and mute) to avoid a work farm, assuring that

no longer possible, and, more and more, the textual referents to the different Waste Land mythemes become ultimately interchangeable, to the point when, at last, the mythemes grow to be interchangeable themselves, effectively executing a (kind of) typically postmodern incredulity towards metanarratives.

Jean-François Lyotard defined the 'postmodern' condition as characterized by the "*incredulity* towards metanarratives" (72), and, indeed, the reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* gives account of such a feeling of suspicion. In fact, the postmodernist[78] texts analyzed at the close of this study (and also some of the 'not-postmodernist' but definitely 'after modernist'[79] texts already examined) facilitate a deconstructive reading of the Waste Land myth as a traditional dominant narrative, for the truth value of the original myth is permanently and explicitly questioned all throughout the twentieth century. Nevertheless, it should be taken into consideration that, in the case of the postmodernist novels interpreted from a myth-critical perspective in this study, the myth explored—that is to say, the Arthurian tale of the Waste Land and the Fisher King—is not the 'metanarrative' that arouses the suspicions of the postmodernist; on the contrary, the metanarrative under suspicion is the *modern* belief in the truth and authenticity of the myth and the discourse that articulates such belief; that is, the promulgated confidence in the validity of myth not simply as a means to explain and structure a particular understanding of the world, but also (and in fact primarily) as a tool to give "a shape and a significance to the immense

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the doctor at the Pendleton Work Farm told him he might be a psychopath as he was "*over*zealous in my sexual relations" (41). Ironically, what from a mythical interpretation should characterize him as being healthy, that is, his sexual vigour, is what allegedly makes him sick. So in the end, even the prodigious sexuality that should oppose the sickness—the main symptom of which, in the 'wasteland' literature, is always sterility—is in fact inextricable from the collective malady that afflicts contemporary society, as the case of the inmate Sefelt—which will be addressed in detail further on—also demonstrates.

[78] As any perceptive reader may realize, 'postmodernism' is far from being a self-explanatory term. As the celebrated critic of postmodernism Ihab Hassan states, the term 'postmodernism' "suffers from a certain *semantic* instability" (276). Paul Maltby summarizes: "the term 'postmodernism' may be summoned to signify a mutation in artistic practice, an epistemic shift in western thought, or a mode of experience and perception specific to the late-capitalism subject to immersed in a sign-saturated, consumer culture" (527). Yet for the purpose of this study, 'postmodernism' will be used as a "literally-critical term" (Maltby 519); that is to say, as a generic term for "postwar self-reflexive/transgressive texts in the context of developments specific to, or more advanced under, late capitalism which have transformed the field of language and communication" (Maltby 528-529). In this view, the postmodernist novels analyzed in this study are three; namely: Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962), and Thomas Pynchon's *V.* (1963), and *The Crying of Lot 49* (1969).

[79] Paul Maltby provides the following explanation: "from a strictly chronological standpoint, American postmodernist fiction follows a long phase of *non-modernist* literature (…) By the late 1930s, after Dos Passos and Faulkner had completed their major work, the modernist impulse in American narrative fiction was largely spent. It was outlived and/or followed by a variety of fictional forms (e.g., naturalist or 'existentialist') which [from the late nineteen-thirties up until the nineteen-fifties] generally adhered to realist conventions of narrative continuity, story, and plot and focused on problems of self definition and existential crisis" (535).

panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (Eliot "Ulysses" 426).[80] Thus, it is the discourse of the Eliotian "mythical method" that was so crucial to the mythical representation and reinterpretation of modernism that is suspected, challenged, and ultimately subverted by postmodernist texts that also reutilize the myth of the Waste Land.[81] In this process towards subverting the mythical method as a successful narrative method to give "significance" to the contemporary world, the reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is crucial.

As it has become recurrent in the 'wasteland' novels after the 1920s, the representation of McMurphy is ambivalent insofar as he stands in for two different mythical entities, that is, the Grail Knight and the Fisher King. This ambiguity results in a reconfiguration of the medieval myth itself, thus proving the fallacious nature of any claims of a universal, unchanging mythical truth from which to draw a *true* significance that can be transplanted into the modern world. Myth is, above all, a story, and postmodernist fiction is self-reflexive—or rather, appropriating Maltby's term, "sign-reflective" (534)—insofar as it seeks to expose that "meaning is wholly or in part (depending on one's view) the 'effect' of [any sign system's] rules and codes which *order signifiers* into narratives" (534, my italics).[82] From a postmodernist standpoint, the meaning—that is, the myth that Kesey's characters reproduce—is the *result* of the ordering of its signifiers—that is, Kesey's characters. Meaning no longer exists *a priori*, so myth—or rather, the true meaning of myth—cannot be believed to exist *a priori*, either. The *immanent* textual representation of the myth—the story of Chief Bromden and Randle McMurphy, in this particular case—*creates* the meaning it supposedly conveys; that is to say, it constructs a posteriori the myth from which, as Kesey's critics have traditionally argued, the novel allegedly drew its significance from.

From a wholly Arthurian standpoint, Barbara Tepa Lupack argues:

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[80] James K. A. Smith explains: "many assume that metanarratives are the target of postmodern disbelief because of their scope, because they make grand, totalizing claims about reality and have universal pretentions (...) [but] for Lyotard, metanarratives are a distinctly modern phenomenon: they are stories that not only tell a grand story (...) but also claim to be able to legitimate or prove the story's claim by an appeal to universal reason (Smith 64-65).

[81] Paul Maltby also recalls Eliot's essay on Joyce's *Ulysses* and his formulation of the "mythical method" to illustrate his claim that "it is the postmodernist preoccupation with the fictionality of meaning which inevitably invites contrasts with (if I may generalize) the high-modernist faith in totalizing meaning-systems, such as those founded on cultural tradition" (520-521).

[82] In Jameson's words: "What we generally call the signified—the meaning or conceptual content of an utterance—is now rather to be seen as a meaning-effect, as that objective mirage of signification generated and projected by the relationship of signifiers among themselves" (324).

> Like the Grail Knight who returns life to the wasteland, McMurphy's eccentric behavior generates some passion in an otherwise passionless environment. Unwilling merely to bear passive witness to the other inmates' lethargy, he fills the sterile ward with sounds long unheard—ribald jokes and songs, which echo in the halls and challenge the Combine's authority as they revive the patients' saltpeppered spirits" (75).

Like the Grail Knight, McMurphy is meant to rehabilitate the Waste Land that is the mental ward, yet far from describing the resolution of the story, Tepa Lupack's words simply recount McMurphy's first weeks at the hospital which, in fact, are the triggering of a narrative of ever-growing violence that certainly challenges any presupposition the reader might hold regarding McMuprhy's heroic triumph. Besides, his seemingly heroic and invigorating restoration is in fact the result of selfishness; as Waldmeir notes, "McMurphy enters the nest to get out of hard work, teaches the patients to gamble in order to win their money, and pursues his wild course partly at least because he had bet the patients that he could cause the nurse to lose her icy composure by means of it" (413). When his self-interest fades and he grows genuinely concerned for the well-being of his fellow inmates, conflict arises, McMurphy's vitality diminishes, and his determination to carry out a regenerative rebellion ultimately diffuses. In Waldmeir's words,

> As long as [self-interest] remain[s] his sole motivation[], McMurphy is in magnificent control of the situation in the nest. But slowly, gradually his self-interest beings to expand, and a new motive subsumes the other three: a feeling of responsibility to and for the other inmates of the nest, a desire, a need, to protect their from the nurse's shears (…) And when the new motivation leads him to violent fight ensues, the Big Nurse starts to snip away. McMurphy is strait-jacketed and hauled off for a calming electrotherapy treatment. (413)

Electroshock therapy operates in the novel as the most explicit signifier of emasculation, as it appeases the violent, vital urges of men. Harding explains to McMurphy: "It was known that men coming out of an epileptic convulsion were inclined to be calmer and more peaceful for a time, and that violent cases completely out of contact were able to carry on rational conversations after a convulsion. No one knew why: they still don't. But it was obvious that if a seizure could be induced in non-epileptics, great benefits might result" (Kesey 146). Horrified, McMuprhy notes that "Electricity through the head (…) [is] like electrocuting a guy for murder" (147), and Harding agrees: "The reasons for both activities are much more closely related than you

might think; *they are both cures*" (147, my italics). Electroshock is a *therapy* but, insofar as it is interpreted as a form of *murder*, it is presented as a cure for a kind of society from which the (incurable) diseased are simply extirpated. Such will be the fate of McMurphy who, after he supposedly rejuvenates and revitalizes the inmates, is subject not only to electroshock, but also to lobotomy, that is, "frontal-lobe castration" (147).

WITNESSING THE END

Besides the singing and the laughing that McMurphy originally introduces in the mental hospital, where, as McMurphy notices, the men are scared to laugh and thus have lost their "footing" to overpower a woman by laughing at her (60), McMurphy's empowering rebellion against the dominion of Nurse Ratched is staged in two main acts: the already commented deep-sea fishing trip, and an unauthorized party he celebrates one night at the hospital, where he lets in two prostitutes so that one of the inmates, Billy Bibbit, who lives terrified of his domineering mother, can finally lose his virginity. These two events, McMurphy's greatest acts of rebellion, and his successful attempt at leading the other patients against Nurse Ratched's oppressive and debilitating regime, entail however terrible repercussions for himself: after the fishing trip, McMurphy is forced under repeated episodes of electroshock therapy for weeks, and, after the party, he is finally lobotomized. Such punishments have often been interpreted by critics as Christ-like sacrifices;[83] it bears recalling, however, that from the myth-ritualistic perspective that has overtly sustained the reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth since T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Christ has been usually regarded as symbolizing the Frazerian divine king, ritualistically sacrificed for the regeneration of his kingdom.[84] Thus identifying McMurphy with Christ, in spite of how popular such identification has been among Kesey's critics, is not simply problematic because of McMurphy's vindication of violence as a force of regeneration but, because, as a matter fact, arguing that McMurphy is "clearly compared to Christ" (Vaitkus 75) seems to place the character in the narrative position of the Fisher King, mythically speaking.

[83] See, most famously, Bruce E. Willis's "Christ in the Cuckoo's Nest, or the Gospel According to Ken Kesey," but also the quoted Vitkus, Foley and Sherwood.
[84] See pp. 195-196.

Inevitably, McMurphy's success in fulfilling his role of hero is questioned for, even if disregarding the myth-ritualistic connection between Christ, the Arthurian Fisher King, and Frazer's divine king, whether McMurphy's sacrifice brings on the redemption of his community is, at least, debatable.[85] In the contemporary world, as the collective voice of those who Christ was meant to save ominously proclaim at the beginning of "What the Thunder Said," Christ's sacrifice only results in death: "He who was living is now dead / We who were living are now dying" (Eliot *TWL* 328-329). The regeneration that McMurphy's sacrifice originates is only an illusion. Taking the party he celebrates for the inmates as an example, it may be observed that what initially appears to be a success, in fact only brings about tragic consequences. Waldmeir explains:

> On the surface, the party is a huge success, with everyone getting happily drunk, the ward being satisfactorily demolished, and McMurphy sleeping with Candy's friend, Sandy. It is climaxed the following morning as Big Nurse discovers the now non-virginal, non-stuttering Billy Bibbit wrapped peacefully in Candy's arms. But with one quick snip, the nurse turns success to failure, manhood to whimpering despair. She tells Billy that it is her duty to inform his mother of his actions, and he suddenly stutters so badly that he cannot even protest. Distracted, cowering, Billy is taken to await the doctor's arrival, and whole alone in the office, he commits suicide by cutting his throat with a scalpel. (414)

McMurphy celebrates the party to liberate Billy from the emasculating yoke of his overbearing mother, to have him reclaim his masculine generative power through the loss of his virginity. But what he achieves is not Billy's vigorous empowering; far from revitalizing Billy and encouraging his will to live, McMurphy's rebellious party results in Billy's suicide. If, as Vaitkus argues, McMurphy is "a kind of sexual savior, come to restore their collective virility" (75), such restoration is, at best, momentary. As evidenced in the case of Billy, Nurse Ratched undoes McMurphy's influence "with one quick snip" (Waldmeir 414), thus reverting the invigorating influx of McMurphy's sacrifice. Hence Harding's triumphant speech towards the end, about how the patients are "still sick men in lots of ways[,]but at least (…) they are sick *men* now[,] no more rabbits" and "maybe they can be well men someday" (Kesey 241) is revealed as a delusion. Terry G. Sherwood blames Kesey himself for what he considers the writer's

[85] McMurphy's Chirst-like role of redeemer is arguably subverted (and perhaps even mocked perversely) when, after the tragic aftermath of his party, Nurse Ratched accuses him of causing the deaths of his fellow inmates. "First Charles Cheswick and now William Bibbit! I hope you're finally satisfied. Playing with human lives—gambling with human lives—as if you thought yourself to be *God*!" (Kesey 249).

failure to convey what he intended to, but, replacing the *ad hominen* criticism with a myth-critical approach, the argument is illuminating:

> Bringing prostitutes into the asylum is saving therapy which, contrary to Kesey's intents, fails to save. Neither of the Irishman's two principal disciples,[86] Harding and Bromden, is fully heterosexual. Sefelt's prodigious sexual powers are merely adjunct to his epilepsy and Billy Bibbit's sexual initiation brings suicide. Despite McMurphy's joking estimate of Bromden's sexual potential, the Indian is asexual; he embraces only the lobotomized body of McMurphy in defense of the Spirit; this murderous act of love could even be seen as homosexual in nature if it were not for the book's overt heterosexuality. Bromden's sexuality simply is not restored with his physical power. (395)

Rather than assuming that the author is somehow making a mistake in intending to write a story about sexual restoration and failing to provide an ending to the novel in which vigorous and regenerative masculine sexuality is restored, it might be helpful to hypothesize that, perhaps, meaning can be drawn from such thwarting of the reader's expectations. Regardless of all possible—and potentially infinite—considerations about intentionality, it seems sensible to argue that, in fact, at the end of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, sexual restoration does not occur, in spite of McMurphy's supposedly heroic sacrifice. In the climax of his mission, in fact, when the inmates liberate their urges and are carried away by their unrepressed desires during the party McMurphy celebrates for them, one of the girls he sneaks into the asylum takes a liking to Sefelt, who, as opposed to the other inmates—castrated to the point that they "even lack the sexual ability to make the grade as adequate rabbits" (Kesey 57)—demonstrates in the episode a prodigious sexual vigour. Significantly, as a chivalrous knight, he vows to protect the girl's privacy when she wishes to use the male latrine: "he would stand at the door while she was in there and guard against intrusions on her privacy, defend it against all comers, by gosh" (238). And he does, fighting the old impaired colonel, "trying to ward off the charges of the wheelchair with his foot" (238). After such a feat, the girl is charmed, and the couple "waltz[] to music nobody c[an] hear" (238). The narrative abandons them as they dance, only to return to them when one of Sefelt's "convulsion cries" (238) travels through the ward, alerting the other inmates that he needs help. Rapidly, another inmate, Fredrickson, puts a wallet between Sefelt's teeth "to keep him from chewing his tongue"(238), while Sandy sits there in awe at Sefelt's

[86] Note the Christian terminology.

exceptional sexual potency, which seems, at first, like the clearest of the inmates' sexual triumphs; yet, just like the mock chivalric episode that precedes their intercourse, the scene is extraordinarily perverse: Sefelt's sexual vigour and Sandy's pleasure are nothing but the side effects of an epileptic seizure that, at last, brings Sefelt to take the anti-epileptic medication that he had been refusing up until then, for fear of losing his teeth and hair:

> 'You all right, Seef? Seef?'
> Sefelt didn't open his eyes, but he raised a limp hand and picked the wallet out of his mouth. He grinned through his spit. 'I'm all right,' he said. 'Medicate me and turn me loose again.'
> 'You really need some medication, Seef?'
> 'Medication.' (238)

Sexual intercourse pacifies Sefelt enough that he accepts medication, as the usual institutional procedure requires, thus confirming Harding's explanation about the origins of electroshock therapy, for "men coming out of an epileptic convulsion were inclined to be calmer and more peaceful for a time" (146). Sexual experience—even when it seems to represent one of the inmates' greatest sexual triumphs—is not simply inextricable from sickness, as it cannot be enjoyed without undergoing a simultaneous epileptic episode, but also, as it induces Sefelt's seizure, it becomes, simply, another form of electroshock therapy, which ultimately deteriorates the men's defencelessness; as Sherwood argues, "modern society standardizes men and straightjackets its misfits; it causes the illness which it quarantines" (385). So in the end, Sefelt's celebrated (yet profoundly sick) sexual prowess is no different from McMurphy's sacrificial castration, that is, his lobotomy and irreversible tranquilization. As evidenced when Harding returns with Sefelt's medication and he sprinkles the pills over Sandy "like he was crumbling clods into a grave" (239), his speech reveals the fate that awaits the inmates after the party that is supposed to be their liberation:

> … you are witnessing the end, the absolute, irrevocable, fantastic end. (…) We are doomed henceforth. Must screw our courage to the sticking point and face up to our impending fate. We shall be all of us shot at dawn. One hundred ccs apiece. Miss Ratched shall line us all against the wall, where we'll face the terrible maw of a muzzle-loading shotgun which has loaded with Miltowns! Thorazines! Lirbiums! Stelazines! And with a wave of her sword, *blooie*! Tranquilize all of us completely out of existence.

A MYTH OF SEXUAL APOCALYPSE

In Vitkus's view, which as already mentioned denounces the novel's misogyny, Kesey's text is "committed to the idea of the male myth" (83), and thus uses the forms of "archetypal romance" (83) to convince the reader of the necessity of rape, justified through "the atavistic male myths of bonding, initiation, freedom and sacrifice [which] are ultimately accompanied by a representation of and an attitude toward women that is atavistic and brutal (and perhaps adolescent as well)" (83). Adolescent indeed, as it is hard to take Harding very seriously when he complains that "man has but *one* truly effective weapon against the juggernaut of modern matriarchy (…) [and] with every passing year in this hip, motivationally research society, more and more people are discovering how to render that weapon useless" (Kesey 60). Yet as the text reveals, Harding's fear of castration is in fact a manifestation of the anxiety caused by his repressed homosexuality; it is not because of how the matriarch Nurse Ratched desexualises herself that Harding cannot "get it up over her" (60). Vitkus argues that *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* not only naturalizes, by means of structuring its plot around a (masculinist) mythical narrative, but actually legitimizes rape, so the reader "celebrates the rape of the Big Nurse" (83). Yet Nurse Ratched is not raped[87] and when the possibility of such an attack is discussed among the inmates—"if it was, say, just this old nurse and her sex worries, then the solution to all your problems would be to just throw her down and solve her worries" (Kesey 148)—McMurphy explains that "there's something bigger making this mess" (148) and that overpowering the nurse would have little effect in repairing their situation of powerlessness.

In agreement with other critics, Vitkus claims that the representation of McMurphy as a hero gives account of "a nostalgia for the male myth of the American frontier hero" (77). As Sherwood also argues, McMuprhy is a typical frontier hero because of his "unrelenting selfhood and independence articulated with verbal calmness and defended by physical valor and ready defiance of opposition" (386). Just like McMurphy represents the Grail Knight inasmuch as he fills in the corresponding slot in the novel's mythical pattern, in terms of his personality he is actually characterized as a

[87] McMurphy tries to strangle her at the end of the novel and his violent attack apparently damages her throat to the point that she loses her voice and thus a fundamental tool to impose her power over the patients. That fact might be interpreted as a symbolic form of rape, but that interpretation needs to be critically justified and cannot be taken for granted.

typical frontier hero,[88] which, as in the case of Roy Hobbs being modelled out of well-known baseball heroes, *multiplies* the mythical references signified by the character, thus increasing the ambiguity in McMurphy's representation as a mythical figure. As it pertains to the American literary tradition, the typical frontiersman that arises out of nineteenth-century literature is "made virtuous and pure by the beneficial influences of nature" (Barsness 419), but the hero's wish to abandon civilization so as to recover a primeval connection with nature—symbolized in the novel by the deep-sea fishing adventure—is, in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, "ultimately tied to a primitive violence that is 'natural' in a very negative way" (Vitkus 84) as it (apparently) "leaves the reader with a rather grim choice-to embrace the male myth of sacrifice and violence as an alternative to the Combine, or to find the text empty of any positive alternative" (87). Yet from a myth-critical perspective that explores the representation of the Waste Land myth in the novel, only the second reading of the two proposed by Vaitkus is possible, because it is the reinterpretation of the myth that absolutely invalidates a reading that assumes that the myth, as reproduced in the text, actually legitimizes the misogynist perspective that naturalizes a system of "masculinist supremacy" (Vitkus 86). For the myth is reshaped, and thus it is re-*created a posteriori*, and its meaning is constructed anew by the rearranging of its signifiers in a specific narrative form (Maltby 534). It is reasonable to argue that, ideologically, the Waste Land myth and, most specifically, its myth-ritualistic interpretation, might be a "most reactionary myth, involving the mystique of male sexuality, which sees men as intrinsically better than women in terms of the dynamism and strength they can impart of the universe" (Boyers 436)—but such argument is hardly consistent with the representation and reinterpretation of the myth in Kesey's novel. Boyers asserts:

> Sex is not here a mere metaphor for passion, nor for any positive engagement with one's fellow human beings. There is a literalism in Kesey's suggestions of sexual apocalypse, with its unavoidable ramifications into a political and social context, which cannot be lightly taken (…) Kesey wants to believe that the source of all terror and passivity is somehow sexual, that the liberation of sexual energies in the form of primal fantasies will enable men to conceive of themselves as more passionate and autonomous individuals. But his intelligence forces him, as it were, against his will, to tell a truth which is more complex and disheartening. (438)

[88] Both heroes are, arguably, variants on the universal archetype of the monomyth, as theorized by Joseph Campbell (see, e.g., Slotkin's *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*). See also next chapter, p. 402.

Once again disregarding—necessarily—all speculations concerning the author's intentions or his intelligence, it cannot be sufficiently stressed that Boyers is arguing that, in the end, *One Flew Over the Cukoo's Nest* defies all beliefs about the regenerating power of unrepressed, violent, and liberated (male) sexuality. In a way, Boyers seems to be arguing against himself, since in the end he even claims that McMurphy's actions to liberate the patients' suppressed—that is, castrated—sexuality, which lead to his attack of Nurse Ratched, "demonstrates the original futility of his project, the necessary brutalization of his sexual ethic, and the dehumanization implicit in the act of invoking an *Eros* which is imperfectly understood and crudely employed" (441). Certainly that is the result of McMurphy's heroic mission of restoration: a perpetuation of futile aggression and cyclical violence from which there is no outside or alternative. For the Grail Knight, in this particular version of the Grail Myth—from a postmodernist standpoint, as legitimate and 'true' as any other, including of course the versions found in the medieval sources—attempts to save the Fisher King and the 'wastelanders' by releasing their repressed sexuality, and he succeeds; but the repercussions of such an allegedly heroic action—the liberation of men's dormant and debilitated sexuality—does not become a source of new life, but a prolongation (perhaps, an aggravation) of their sickness. The myth is structural and functional in the novel, but its 'meaning'—the ideology upon which the myth is founded—has been remade.

At the end of the story, the Grail Knight—once more—inherits the Fisher King's wound. If he becomes a Christ-like figure only after he sacrifices himself, then he is Christ-like also in Frazerian terms, for he becomes a Fisher-King figure too, crowned as the patients' saviour—hence meant, in mythical terms, to replace the King—and the sickest of them all. But even before the lobotomy, McMurphy is powerless, "like one of those moving-picture zombies, obeying orders beamed at him from forty masters" (Kesey 250). Chief Bromden realizes: "It was us that had been making him go on for weeks, keeping him standing long after his feet and legs had given out, weeks of making him wink and grin and laugh and go on with his act long after his humour had been parched dry between two electrodes" (Kesey 250). McMurphy has now succeeded Chief Bromden; as Madden claims: "by the end of the novel, McMurphy is as obedient to the desires of the ward as the Chronics and blacks were to Big Nurse's desires at the novel's beginning" (206). Hence the patients are not truly saved, but transformed from

victims into the victimizers of McMurphy, in fact perpetuating the unbreakable cycle of violence and domination:

> [T]here is no solid evidence that any of the discharged patients has taken responsibility for his role in McMurphy's destruction. Nor is there evidence that any of the ward members has become sane. Some have simply transferred themselves to other wards. Harding's return to his wife gives no indication that any of his problems have cleared up. Although they have discharged themselves, Sefelt and Fredrickson are still faced with the 'double bind' of epileptic fits or rotting gums. Though the composition of the ward has changed, nothing significant has happened to any of the ward members—except Big Chief. (Madden 210)

At the end of the novel, it is uncertain whether Chief Bromden is truly healed or not. After killing McMuprhy once he has become "one of those store dummies" (Kesey 252), Chief Brodmen runs away from the asylum. Displaying his extraordinary physical strength, he launches the control panel of the tub-room (the heart of the Combine) through a window, and observes "the glass splashed out in the moon, like a bright cold water baptizing the sleeping earth" (254). The land is seemingly baptized, but with broken glass instead of water. Violence is unavoidable. Assuming that Bromden's escape and physical empowerment signify his healing, in this version of the mythical tale the King's restoration to health does not bring about the rehabilitation of his kingdom and, consequently, the belief behind the myth—the metanarrative contained in the myth of the Waste Land—is invalidated. And, moreover, the hero has inherited the king's wound.[89]

At the end of the novel, McMuprhy has been lobotomized and has become a Fisher King figure. But he is also compared to a zombie from a movie, in the same way as, when he was healthy and performing the hero role, he was compared to a comic-book hero, the Lone Ranger, who wears a mask and carries a silver bullet that has

[89] Beyond the ambiguity entailed by the symbolization of McMurphy as both Grail Knight and Fisher King, which, as explored, became a trend in the reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth after the 1920s, it is the original Fisher King who sacrificially kills the original Grail Knight, thus reversing the ritualistic pattern contained in the original myth that identifies the Fisher King with the Frazerian divine king. In Kesey's novel, however, this inversion of the mythical pattern results in a situation of role reversal. In the end, Bromden's escape and arguable return to nature places him in the position—previously taken by McMurphy—of the American frontier hero, which stresses the ambivalence in the mythical representation of the main two characters. Bromden's final identification with the frontiersman, after all, can be considered to corroborate the hypothesis that, as some have argued, Bromden, and not McMurphy, is in fact the archetypal hero in the novel (see Méndez 373-379). But, as McMurphy, Bromden is the fixed textual signifier that refers to changeable, contradicting signifieds, the meaning of which can no longer be taken for granted as aprioristically true.

supernatural prosperities (Kesey 242). Zombie movies and comic-strips are products of the cultural industry that dominated America at the time and, along with the previously commented identification of McMurphy with a frontier hero—who is not, in fact, the literary frontiersman, but his mass-media inheritor, the "TV-cowboy" (67)—serve to multiply the references that McMurphy appeals to. The depth of mythical archetypes is replaced by the "multiple surfaces" of contemporary culture as Jameson would claim (328), and the "great semiotic opposition between signifier and signified" is repudiated (Jameson 328). The Grail Knight figure of medieval myth is actualized by superimposing characteristics from multiple contemporary cultural icons, such as the TV cowboy or, in the time of defeat, a zombie—which despite the apparent ludicrousness is a highly eloquent symbol to signify a state of death in life which has traditionally characterized existence in the Waste Land along the twentieth century. The crowd of ghosts crossing London Bridge in *The Waste Land* are replaced by—or rather (d)evolved into—the image of hordes of zombies drawn from the cinema, and consequently the representation of the myth is modernized, so to speak, so that it better gives account of the preoccupations of a particular social climate. In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, then, it can be argued that the recreated Waste Land myth symbolizes the social climate of standardization, mechanization and dehumanization of a civilization that, during the 1950s and 1960s, specialized in life-repressive forms of social control that annihilate individuality in favour of an all-encompassing uniformity. Such is the "modern machine culture" which is "the most recent manifestation of society's threat to the individual" (Sherwood 385). Such is, also, Kesey's Waste Land in which, as already mentioned, modern society "causes the illness which it quarantines" (385). In the text analyzed in this chapter, pre-modern myth articulates a (post-)modern context, but this time, the principles of "the mythical method" that dictated mythical representation in modernism have been *visibly* subverted.

In Kesey's postmodernist novel, the myth is not an unchangeable story from which the contemporary world draws significance by contrast, that is to say, opposing contemporary anarchy to per-modern order. As opposed to previously examined reinterpretations of the Waste Land myth in twentieth-century American literature, in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, the Grail Knight's quest ends, in fact, in the (at least apparent) restoration of the Fisher King's health. The remaking of the myth is made explicit by the "literalism" that denounces Boyers (438) in the representation of the traditional story and of the deducible inference consistent with such literal

representation regarding the life-giving potency of male sexuality. But in the new myth, as it has been remade through the rearranging of its signifiers, the effect of the King's healing is not the physical and spiritual rebirth of the Waste Land. The inextricable sympathetic connection between the king and the land no longer justifies or sustains the myth; it is not broken or suspended, but denied. The Grail is nowhere to be found. Regeneration, in short, is simply not a part of the story anymore, as myth itself has ceased to be "an objectivity that lies outside [representation]" (Jameson, qt. in Herman 161). Now, regeneration is not simply unattainable, or superficial and limited to the political or economic sphere; it is not even the hero's goal, or his destiny. As explained, the hero's desire for the sexual restoration of the inmates—at which he succeeds—only results in the perpetuation of violence and the worsening of the patients' condition. If the Knight believes himself to be a redeemer, he is either delusional or an egomaniacal blasphemer.[90] For it is no longer an issue of failure to complete the quest and restore the land; the Waste Land myth, *remade* in the texts of literary postmodernism, no longer includes the possibility of renewal and restoration as part of the tale.

[90] See note 85 in this chapter, p. 366.

CHAPTER 15

THOMAS PYNCHON'S *V.* AND *THE CRYING OF LOT 49*: THE WASTE LAND MYTH AS A MYTH OF ANNIHILATION

TO BE OR NOT TO BE

In his study about the 'wasteland novels' of the 1960s, Raymond Olderman writes that Thomas Pynchon's *V.* (1963) is "like a prose version of Eliot's *The Waste Land*" (123) as it "pictures a world where love and mythology have failed" (123). Despite the straightforwardness and clarity of such a statement, from the perspective of this study, *V.* cannot be considered simply as a prose version of *The Waste Land* because the lament for the failure of mythology in the task of giving shape and significance to contemporary anarchy found in Eliot's poem is in fact replaced in Pynchon's novel by the reassurance that it is contemporary anarchy that is responsible for the creation of new (but just as true) versions of the old myth which, regrettably, are shaped as a holy quest, but are in fact a quest in search of annihilation. For such is the myth of the Waste Land as it is remade and retold in American postmodernist novels: the heroic but destructive journey across "the street of the 20th century" (Pynchon *V.* 323):

> It is the acid test. To populate, or not to populate. Ghosts, monsters, criminals, deviates represent melodrama and weakness. The only horror about them is *the dreamer*'s own horror of isolation. But the desert, or a row of false shop fronts; a slag pile, a forge where the fires are banked, these and the street and *the dreamer*,

> only an inconsequential shadow himself in the landscape, partaking of the soullessness of these other masses and shadows; this is the 20th century nightmare. (Pynchon *V.* 324, my italics.)

Pynchon's 1963 novel recreates "the 20th century nightmare" by means of alternating between two stories: one features the discharged US Navy sailor, Benny Profane, who returns to Manhattan and reconnects with a group of bohemian friends, named the Whole Sick Crew; the other follows Herbert Stencil's quest as he pursues a mysterious entity, V., whose multiple manifestations across the world—each marking the beginning of a history-shaping international crisis—have haunted his and his father's existence. Rather than running parallel, both storylines increasingly converge towards the end of the narrative, like two lines intersecting to form a V-shape. The apex of the V corresponds to the shipwreck that closes the novel, when a sudden waterspout sinks Stencil Sr.'s boat into the depths of the Mediterranean, establishing the end of the quest for V. as a plunge into the abyss beneath a seat that "showed nothing at all of what came to lie beneath" (492). The progressive movement of the traditional quest is thus replaced by the entrapment of a V-shaped journey that irrevocably leads to disappearance (in the form, of course, of death by water). If the mystery that the Grail hides, traditionally, is the answer to Hamlet's question—to be or not to be, that becomes, in Pynchon's terms, "to populate, or not to populate"—and the hero's task is to overcome the paralysis that assaults him when the answer is provided and he realizes that "all life is sorrowful" (Campbell 424),[91] it can be argued that, when living in the twentieth-century nightmare, the hero has succeeded: he has become a dreamer. He has chosen *not* to be, but instead "to sleep, perchance to dream" (Shakespeare *Hamlet* III.I. 65). No longer bound by the limits of his consciousness, he has known the mystery of the Grail and has accepted that "all life is sorrowful," the hero dreams a nightmare:

> As spread thighs are to the libertine, flights of migratory birds to the ornithologist, the working part of his tool bit to the production machinist, so was the letter V to young Stencil. He would dream perhaps once a week that it had all been a dream, and that now he'd awakened to discover the pursuit of V. was merely a scholarly quest after all, an adventure of the mind, in the tradition of *The Golden Bough* or *The White Goddess*.
> But soon enough he'd wake up the second, real time, to make again the tiresome discovery that it hadn't really ever stopped being the same simple-minded, literal pursuit; V. ambiguously a beast of venery, chased like the hart, hind or hare,

[91] See p. 181.

> chased like an obsolete, or bizarre, or forbidden form of sexual delight. (Pynchon *V.* 61)

Pynchon's questing hero in *V.*, Stencil, dreams in a spiral: he dreams that he wakes up from a dream, and wakes up to realize he is dreaming, as a sort of Segismundo, who, confused after he is repeatedly forced to believe that what he has lived he has only dreamed, ends up believing "que el vivir sólo es soñar" (Calderón de la Barca 2154). But Stencil has not being lied to into mistaking reality for a dream; rather, he has taken the final step that Hamlet was much too cowardly to take himself. Rather than living, Stencil dreams wilfully, and by transcending the limits of his consciousness, he has come to known the mystery of the Grail ("all life is sorrowful") and managed to avoid the subsequent paralysis. He dares wander "the undiscovered country, from whose bourn / No traveller returns" (Shakespeare *Hamlet* III.I. 79-80), and there, in "the Kingdoms of Death" (Pynchon *V.* 411) that he explores, he fearlessly pursues his "dream of annihilation" (206)—that, is, the dream that comes "in that sleep of death" (Shakespeare *Hamlet* III.I. 66) for the Grail Hero.[92] He reaches "the world axis" (Campbell 424)—now unmistakably shaped as the letter V—and acquires the true knowledge of life. What makes the Grail Hero eligible as redeemer among the other men is his ability to endure the true knowledge of life, without illusion or rationalization, and still persevere without falling prey to inaction and stasis; as already seen, Joseph Campbell reformulates this as "relieving the Maimed King in such a way as to inherit his role *without* the wound" (Campbell 424). In this view, the end of the mythical quest corresponds to finally contemplating the answer to Hamlet's paralysing question, which Nietzsche indentifies with "the ecstasy of the Dionysiac state" (*Tragedy* 40).[93] Once followed by the inevitable return to consciousness, "it is experience as such with a sense of revulsion" (40); because after the "*acquired knowledge* (…) no solace has any effect, there is a longing for a world beyond death, beyond the gods or in some immortal Beyond. Once truth has been seen, the consciousness of it prompts man to see only what is terrible or absurd in existence wherever he looks" (40).

[92] This reference to 'death' is not literal, but represents the overcoming of the fear of death that cripples (Hamlet's) life; it is thus the transcendental knowledge hidden in the Grail, and the hero's capacity to endure after such knowledge. Such endurance, as it has been examined, was unbearable for characters (and grail seekers) such as Marlow, Nora Flood, Roy Hobbs, or Patrick McMurphy, who were unable to inherit the King's role without inheriting the wound.
[93] See p. 319.

Pynchon's Stencil succeeds in completing the heroic mission: he wilfully pursues the dream that reveals the meaning of V., and refuses to be "nauseated" (Nietzsche 40) by the consciousness of the horror of existence. Stencil chooses to *dream* the horror, beyond consciousness. And yet, he fails as a redeemer. The true knowledge of life that Stencil embraces without paralysis is the revelation of an unredeemable inanimateness that has replaced all forms of life in the Waste Land. Life is no longer swollen with death. This was, after all, part of the natural cycle of life, regardless of how cruel and morbid such cycle might be in the Waste Land, especially after *The Waste Land*. Now, however, life is altogether nonexistent. It has extinguished, forever. Not even "a little life" remains in the "dried tubers" to feed the dead land and breed springtime lilacs (Eliot *TWL* 1-7). As V. reveals to Stencil, there is no more life; there is only a robotic appearance of life in which "everything works by electricity. Simple and clean" (Pynchon *V.* 81).

Simultaneously, as the hero discloses the truth behind V.—the letter shaped not only like the novel's structure, but also like a womb, or a grail—he realizes that all forms of the V. he searches are variations on an art theme: "the single melody, banal and exasperating, of all Romanticism since the Middle Ages: 'the act of love and the act of death are one'" (410). Such is the revelation behind V., and such is the reason for the reformulation of Hamlet's question into "to populate, or not to populate" (324): to love is to be inanimate; to populate is to condemn to inanimateness. In *V.*, the knowledge behind the Grail entails the dreamer's exploration of an "inanimate kingdom" (Pynchon *V.* 411): Pynchon's version of the twentieth-century American Waste Land. As in the inner structure of the myth that Joseph Campbell describes, when the Grail reveals itself to the Knight, the Knight acquires the true knowledge of life; but the "primal precondition of life" that the hero learns is not simply that "all life is sorrowful" (Campbell 424), but that, in fact, in the twentieth century nightmare, all life is *lifeless*. Stencil at last apprehends the final evolutionary stage of V.:

> …skin radiant with the bloom of some new plastic; both eyes glass but now containing photoelectric cells, connected by silver electrodes to optic nerves of purest copper wire and leading to a brain exquisitely wrought as a diode matrix could ever be. Solenoid relays would be her ganglia, servo-actuators move her flawless nylon limbs, hydraulic fluid be sent by a platinum heart-pump through butyrate veins and arteries. Perhaps (…) even a complex system of pressure transducers located in a marvellous vagina of polyethylene; the variable arms of their Wheatstone bridges all leading to a single silver cable which fed pleasure-

> voltages direct to the correct register of the digital machine in her skull. And whenever she smiled or grinned in ecstasy there would gleam her crowning feature: Eigenvalue's precious dentures. (Pynchon 411-412)

THE INANIMATE LAND

V., counterpart of the Grail in Pynchon's version of the mythical quest, is in fact an emblem of love but, rather than incarnating the life-giving sexuality that should restore the Fisher King's health and rehabilitate the Waste Land, it stands in for, in Tony Tanner's words, "a fetishist love which is against life" (*Pynchon* 46). Thus the knowledge that V. provides is not sorrowful yet ultimately redemptive, as it was to be expected in the pre-modern versions of the myth; instead, V. is revealed to be little but one more part among many in the assembly that makes up "the inanimate Kingdom" (411). In Cooley's terms, "V. offers a portrait of an expanding empire of the inanimate, of imperialism as western culture's sadomasochistic quest to reduce everything, first Other and finally Self, to inert matter" (308). Thus in the end, in Stencil's eyes, V., the alleged Grail, is either "a purely determined organism, an automaton, constructed, only quaintly, of human flesh," or "an inanimate object of desire" (Pynchon *V.* 411). As Mattessich explains, "V. the fetishizer also stands in as the fetish which exercises her various male fetishizers (Stencil, Godolphin, Father Fairing, Fausto) and that thus organizes or constitutes their desire" (512). So V. constitutes both the source and the object of a fetishist love which, as Tanner argues, is *against* life. For the relationship between (fetishist) desire and inanimateness is two-fold, as demonstrated by Benny Profane sexual aversion. Mattessich argues that what afflicts Pynchon's 'wastelanders' is not only desire for the inanimate—that is, the fetishist desire for V.—, but the fact that desire itself is "the inanimate in us" (511):

> This is why the novel abounds with characters in love with machines (Rachel Owlglass with her MG, Pig Bodine with his Harley Davidson) and why, more disturbingly, characters reveal themselves to *be* machines, rigged with switches or constructed out of synthetic plastic. Sexual desire, Profane observes, reduces people to the level of objects, inserts them within a machine of imaginary projections and partial objects made to bear the weight and function of an irretrievably lost and full presence. His strategy in the face of this is to refuse the sexual as best he can, to hide in a sort of celibate withdrawal and watch how desire is articulated into the inanimate. (Mattessich 511)

Benny Profane's name, that is *Benjamin*, has led some critics to identify him with a *profane* Christ-like figure (Hendin 43).[94] As repeatedly explained throughout this study, such an (admittedly far-fetched) identification would allegedly place him, in myth-critical terms, in the position of the Fisher King in V.'s recreation of the Waste Land myth, hence paralleling Stencil's characterization as Grail Knight. Nonetheless, both identifications are equally unconventional and subversive, and, as in the cases of novels previously explored in the fourth part of this study, the characters of Profane and Stencil end up converging.[95] As a Grail-Knight figure is meant to do, Stencil is questing for the Grail, V., but he is also metaphorically reincarnating another memorable V. seeker, Fausto Maijstral. Significantly, through this identification, Grail Knight and Fisher King coalesce into one textual signifier: the 'V. quester' in *V.*, a new kind of mythical character who embodies both the legendary characteristics of the Grail Knight and the Fisher King, and who seems to multiply *ad infinitum* in the V-plot.

Fausto Maijstral is a very eloquent example. Fausto, a Maltese civilian enduring the German bombardment of the island during World War II, relates his life to his daughter on a letter, which coincides with Chapter 11 of Pynchon's novel. This letter—almost entirely made up of both, obscure and overt references to the whole corpus T.S. Eliot's poetry—recounts Fausto's life story as a strangely psychopathic transformation into a series of different persons, designated as a succession of kings in a dynasty: he starts as Fausto Maijstral the First and later on becomes Fausto II, Fausto III and, lastly, Fausto IV. As Stencil's journey in pursuit of V., Fausto's life embodies "a clear movement toward death or, preferably, non-humanity" (Pynchon *V.* 321); each (dynastic-like) succession, of course, entails the progressive and ineluctable degeneration of Fausto's land: "As Fausto II and III, like their island, became more inanimate, they moved closer to the time when like any dead leaf of fragment of metal they'd be finally subject to the laws of physics" (321). As the king becomes inanimate, so does his land; in *V.*, the Waste Land has thus become the Inanimate Land. The quester—the Grail Knight—becomes the King, and as he plunges into the kingdom of

[94] The Hebrew meaning of 'Benjamin' is "son of the right hand" (McHaney 21), which connects the name with the figure of Christ, as "after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God" (*KJB*, Mark. 16.19)

[95] As do their respective plotlines when, at the end of the novel, they both travel to Malta, consequently structuring the well-known novel shape of a V.

the inanimate, inanimateness only spreads further and deeper until it pervades every corner of the Waste Land.

Parallel to the identification between Stencil and Fausto Maijstral, the identification between the two main characters, Stencil and Benjy Profane, is made explicit once their respective plotlines converge, thus certifying that "[Stencil] is as much a schlemiel and a human yo-yo as Benny Profane." (127). Indeed, Profane's passivity and sexual nausea add up to his name to allow for the recognition of the character as a Fisher-King figure, which, keeping in mind Eliot's representation of the Fisher King in "What the Thunder Said', is not entirely incompatible with the argument that Profane is seemingly in possession of "the peace that passeth understanding" (Hendin 43), as he seems completely indifferent to the horrors that surround him, "revelling in disorder and disconnectedness" (Palmeri par. 21). However, and beyond the difficulties found in disregarding the already explained argument that Eliot's final line "Shantih shantih shantih" in fact stands as the onomatopoeic confirmation of Madame Sosostris's ominous warning of death by water,[96] it must be noted that Benny Profane's indifference is hardly peaceful. His yo-yoing—his aimless, mechanical, pendulum-like motion up and down the East coast, or between Times Square and Grand Central on the subway, which will not ever take him anywhere but infinitely back and forth—is a sign of the character's drive towards the fate he fears and despises the most: inanimateness. He eloquently self-identifies with a mechanical toy, which seems to indicate that his feelings of repulsion towards sex (which he considers to be the strongest force leading mankind toward inanimateness[97]) are not only rooted in his fear of becoming inanimate, but in the underlying fear of emasculation. Eloquently, he fully realizes what it means to be a yo-yo during a meeting with his occasional girlfriend, Rachel Owlglass, when his vivid sexual fantasies crash violently once contrasted with the fact that, if fantasy were to become reality, Rachel would "have him" (217):

[96] See p. 210.

[97] This view is in fact no different from Cleanth Brooks's interpretation of the sexual encounter between the typist and the carbuncular man in "The Fire Sermon", which clearly differentiates between the ritualized and anesthetized love that defers the satisfaction of desire, and the lust that, attempting for the immediate extirpation of desire, ends up defeating its own ends (see p. 204). It is a common view among the critics of *V.* that "the inversion of love in transvestism, fetishism, lesbianism, or simple exploitation" is what transforms 'desire' into a weapon of inanimateness. Yet the opposite could also be argued: in the Waste Land recreated in *V.*, which is a world where all humanity has been replaced by robotics and prosthetics, love can only take form in sterile and ultimately deadly manifestations. If these are the effects and not the cause—as Profane's failed resistance against inanimateness seems to indicate—there is no hope of restoring the Waste Land, as the curse that plights the land cannot be lifted through the regenerative love brought about by the life-giving properties of the mythical Grail.

> Strangely then the tumescence began to subside, the flesh at his neck to pale. Any sovereign or broken yo-yo must feel like this after a short time of lying inert, rolling, falling: suddenly to have its hands its own umbilical string reconnected, and know the other end is in hands it cannot escape. Hands it doesn't want to escape. Know that the simple clockwork of itself has no more need for symptoms of inutility, lonesomeness, directionlessness, because now it has a path marked out for it over which it as no control. That's what the feeling would be, if there were such things as animate yo-yos. Pending any such warp in the world Profane felt like the closest thing to one and above her eyes began to doubt his own animateness. (217)

After an episode of imaginary sexual frenzy, Profane finds comfort in the return to his inanimate yo-yoing. He claims that "anybody who worked for inanimate money so he could buy more inanimate objects was out of his head," as "inanimate money was to get animate warmth, dead fingernails in the living shoulderblades, quick cries against the pillow, tangled hair, lidded eyes, twisting loins.." (214); yet his craving for *dead* fingernails reveals the contradiction inherent to his expressed desire. When later on Mafia futilely tries to seduce him, saying that she needs a man "fashioned for Heroic Love" (287), Profane protests that there is "nothing heroic about a schlemihl" (288). In Profane's mind, a hero is a "master of the inanimate" (288), the thing he hates and fears the most. A schlemihl, however, is "hardly a man: somebody who lies back and takes from objects, like any passive woman" (288). Mafia accuses him of being a "latent homosexual (…) afraid of women" (288), but Profane denies it: "'No, I'm not queer.' How could you say: sometimes women remind me of inanimate objects" (288). Once again, it seems like it is the pull towards inanimateness that is the cause to Profane's sexual nausea; but at last his inner monologue reveals what he truly longs for: "Someday, please God, there would be an all-electronic woman. Maybe her name would be Violet. Any problems with her, you could look it up in the maintenance manual. Module concept: fingers' weight, heart's temperature, mouth's size out of tolerance? Remove and replace, was all" (385).

In the end, Profane's desire for a detachable all-electronic robot-woman named Violet is revealed as his own yearning to find V., which connects him with Stencil's quest, ultimately diluting the differences that separate the questing hero—now in pursuit of his own annihilation—and the paralyzed man afflicted by the universal malady of Pynchon's wastelanders: the pull towards the inanimateness. Once again, of course, Profane's identification with the mythical Fisher King is unsurprisingly problematic.

Profane is one among many.[98] Profane is sick (as all of the members of the Whole *Sick* Crew are evidently sick) and his sexual aversion makes him at least symbolically impotent, but, as he realizes himself, he is hardly a king. In the Waste Land of New York City, where a homeless man who sleeps in the subway is the king "under the street and under the sea" (Pynchon *V.* 215), Profane's yo-yoing makes him "not like a king, he figured: more like a schlemihl, a follower" (215). He does not dare leave Manhattan; travels only up down from Times Square to Grand Central and back, while the homeless man, "the king of the subway" (215), journeys "out to Brooklyn and back, tons of water swirling over his head and he perhaps dreaming his own submarine country, peopled by mermaids and deep-sea creatures all at peace among the rocks and sunken galleons" (215).

As mentioned, ultimately Profane's dream is no different from Stencil's, as they both long for the inanimate kingdom of death in which V. is the Grail-like source of a still life that uncannily recalls—while clearly exacerbating—the well-known process of crystallization that Ellen Thatcher's brings upon herself in *Manhattan Transfer*.[99] But the reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth in the two novels by Thomas Pynchon analyzed in this chapter is also sustained in a literalism that was already introduced in Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest.* Ellen Thatcher's progressive degeneration into a still-life figure was amply symbolic, for her final characterization as a porcelain figure in a bell glass was meant to be taken as a metaphor of how the life in the modern metropolis had irreparably destroyed the character's vitality; in *V.*, the transformation of characters into inanimate objects is one-hundred-per-cent literal. Prosthetics replace living matter, as most expressively represented by Esther's infamous nose operation, performed by the practitioner Schoenmaker, who lives obsessed by "the introduction of inert substances into the living faces" (Pynchon *V.* 99) after he met Evan Godolphin, a young aviator whose face was blown off during World War II. After his war wounds, Godolphin—a character who, along with his father the South Pole explorer Hugh Godolphin, appears here and there in the V.-narrative, related to different incarnations of V. such as Victoria W. and Veronica Manganese—"received a nose bridge of ivory, a cheekbone of silver and a paraffin and celluloid chin" (100). Yet his facial

[98] "Benny Profane might not like a world in which people treat themselves and each other as objects and in various ways replace the animate or human with the inanimate, but he does not or cannot resist it, and it could be said that in effect he is part of it. He is another of the century's children" (Tanner *Pynchon* 48-9).
[99] Seep. 231.

reconstruction was not only futile but ultimately destructive, as the deleterious effect of the inanimate matter ruined what little remained of his living face due to the "foreign body reaction" (100), demonstrating that, the kingdom of the inanimate not only replaces the living world, but in fact destroys whatever forms of life may remain, transforming animate matter into inanimate substance in a form of perverse procreation.[100]

Eloquently, when Esther's arrived at Schoenmaker's office, he "took her gently by the hand. She felt passive, even (a little?) sexually aroused. She was seated in a dentist's chair, tilted back and prepared by Irving, who hovered about her like a hand-maiden" (104). Sexual overtones pervade the scene from beginning to end, explicitly when the narrator describes the scene, meta-textually, as a "sexual metaphor" (105). Esther's nose operation is explicitly described as a form of prosthetic reproduction that brings about a new kind of inanimate life. She herself describes her experience: "It was almost a mystic experience. What religion is it—one of the Eastern ones—where *the highest condition we can attain is that of an object*—a rock. It was like that; I felt myself drifting down, this delicious loss of Estherhood, becoming more and more a blob, with no worries, traumas, nothing: only Being…" (106, my italics). As soon as Schoenmaker's removes her stitches, their relationship becomes sexual, which reveals that his operating truly functions as a prosthetic reproductive procedure in which the debasement of sex is explicit: "She was sexually turned on, was all: as if Schoenmaker had located and flipped a secret switch or clitoris somewhere inside her nasal cavity. A cavity is a cavity, after all" (109). Such is, ironically, "the highest condition" humankind can attain, and it results simultaneously in Esther's progressive objectification—she "roamed the East Side in fugue, scaring people with her white beak" (108-9)—and in an unwanted pregnancy that Esther, aided by the Whole Sick Crew, chooses to terminate, thus corroborating the annihilation of life and its

[100] Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that even though this new process of 'wasting'—that is to say, the plunge towards inanimateness—is explicitly a transformation of living matter into a series of inanimate, electronic, or robotic elements, the (medieval) mythical metaphor of the plague still pervades the new representation of the Waste Land. Towards the end of the novel, Stencil Sr. arrives at the conclusion that "sometime between 1859 and 1919, the world contracted a disease which no one ever took the trouble to diagnose because the symptoms were too subtle—blending in with the events of history, no different one by one but altogether—fatal" (Pynchon *V.* 461). As Cooley perceptively notes, such disease that plagues Pynchon's Waste Land in *V.* is in fact "the conquest of the animate by the inanimate, [which] proceeds, in V., along fairly clear lines, from object-love to fetishism and sadism, and finally to self-destruction" (309).

substitution by prosthetics.[101] But the paroxysm of debased sexuality as a form of procreating inanimateness—interpreted as a perverse representation of the life-forces in which the Waste Land myth is rooted—is not actually found in Esther's story, but in the life and death of Melanie L'Heuremaudit, a dancer who believes herself to be—or rather, wishes herself to be—a mechanical doll.

A STILL-LIFE OF LOVE

The Lady V. meets Melanie L'Heuremaudit and falls in love with her in Paris, in the year 1913, on the eve of World War I. By that time, V.—a synecdoche of the entire western civilization, degenerating towards the annihilation of the Great War[102]—has already become inanimate and is consequently fascinated with Melanie's own drive towards inhumanity. More than anything, Melanie wants to die, and her death wish is articulated into a plea for rain all throughout Chapter 14, which is reminiscent of Emily Baldwin's desperate wishes for rain in *Manhattan Transfer*.[103] But while the clouds billowed over Manhattan were "*blooming* compactly like a cauliflower" (Dos Passos 172, my italics), the clouds that Melanie observes from the heights off Montmartre "hung like *leprous tissue*" (Pynchon *V.* 394, my italics). In a city where certain quarters "were touched by its halo of plague" (393), there is no doubt that if the dry thunder were to bring down rain, it would only aggravate the sickness of the city. It is not incidental that Melanie pleads for rain—"God, would it ever rain?" (396)—while rehearsing for the premiere of a ballet, *The Rape of the Chinese Virgins*, which is modelled after Igor Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*.[104] For Pynchon's novel actually reutilizes the modernist

[101] The fact that Eshter's objectification culminates in an abortion allows for the interpretation that, in fact, Esther's degeneration into inanimateness morbidly exacerbates, in a way, Ellen Thatcher's *metaphorical* process of crystallization.

[102] Itague, the producer of Mélanie's ballet, explains that "a decadence (…) is a falling-away from what is human, and the further we fall the less human we become. Because we are less human, we foist off the humanity we have lost on inanimate objects and abstract theories" (405).

[103] Dos Passos's novel reads: "'Oh, I'm the most miserable woman,' she groaned and got to her feet. He head ached as if it were bound with hot wire. She went to the window and leaned into the sunlight. (…) Beyond the northwest a shinning head of clouds soared blooming compactly like a cauliflower. Oh if it would only rain. As the thought came to her there was a low growl of thunder above the din of building and of traffic. Oh if it would only rain" (171-172).

[104] *Rite of Spring* was produced for the first time in 1913, and it recreates various rituals in celebration of the advent of spring. It culminates with the death of a young woman, whose sacrifice incarnates the nature rite carried out to bring about the regeneration of the land in springtime. Despite the evident thematic similarities between Stravinsky's famous ballet and T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, as it was previously mentioned (see p. 193), Eliot criticized *Rite of Spring* because, according to his judgement, in

ballet, transforming the vegetation rite recreated in it—quite literally—to give account of the *post-modern* condition depicted in the novel. In Pynchon's updated ballet, there is a young woman sacrificed onstage, Melanie, whose literal sacrifice (as in the ritual supposedly enacted) is in fact a manifestation of her wish for the rains that the ritual—performed literally—will bring about. But the rains, as already described, are announced as leprosy, and, moreover, every plea for rain that Melanie utters throughout the chapter is accompanied by the memory of her father's sexual abuse. Yet Melanie still wishes for the rain that will bring about a new life, leprous at best, mechanical at worst, but in all cases engendered from some of the many "inversions of love" that Olderman notes as embodied by V: abuse, transvestism, fetishism and lesbianism (133):

> 'You are not real.'
> 'I…' Hands resting *dead* on her things.
> 'Do you know what a fetish is? Something of a woman which gives pleasure but is not a woman. A shoe, a locket… une jaretière. You are the same, not real but an *object* of pleasure.'
> Mélanie could not speak.
> 'What are you like unclothed? A *chaos of flesh*. But as Su Feng, lit by hydrogen, oxygen, a cylinder of lime, moving doll-like in the confines of your costume… You will drive Paris mad. Women and men alike.' (Pynchon *V*. 404, my italics.)

Eloquently, Mélanie embodies the Lady V.'s fetishist fantasy—their sexual relationship is described by Stencil as "a well-composed and ageless still-life of love" (409)—not by herself, but once she transforms into Su Feng, that is, the sacrificial virgin killed during the vegetation rite in the ballet she performs. But what is meant to be performance transforms into an actual sacrificial death once Mélanie becomes *La Jarretiére*, and forgets to wear "the one inanimate object that would have saved her" (414), a protective metal device to fit the point of the pole in which Su Feng was meant to be impaled. As a consequence, she kills herself onstage, completing the sacrificial life rite in what constitutes a perfect example of what T.S. Eliot defined as "the sense of the present" (qt. in Litz 19) that any ancient myth should convey once reinterpreted to give

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Stravinsky's ballet "one missed the sense of the present" (qt. in Litz 19). So while in Stravinsky's ballet the underlying vegetation rite remains untouched—that is, it is represented literally on stage, thus giving account of nothing but the ancient culture it belonged to—in *The Waste Land*, the vegetation rites that underlie the Arthurian myth were reinterpreted and transformed so, in the end, the falling rain that follows the rite can no longer be interpreted as the redeeming rebirth of springtime bringing about new life, but as a manifest act of cruelty executed upon both the living and the dead. From such an act of cruelty one derives the "sense of the present" in Eliot's poem; in Pynchon's recreation of Stravinsky's primeval nature rites, that "sense of the present" is also explicitly carried by the violence and morbidity of Melanie's literal sacrifice.

account of the modern world: the chapter ends with the actual completion of the vegetation rite that should result in the pouring of the rain that Mélanie longed for. But that rain was never connoted as regenerative. Mélanie recognizes that the clouds hang over Paris like "leprous tissue" (Pynchon *V.* 394) because she knows what the rain will bring; but she does not "fear death by water" (Eliot *TWL* 54). Mélanie wishes for death, and that longing is made manifest in her desire for an inorganic sexuality that rather than a life force constitutes a force of inanimateness.[105] Consequently, her death on the sacrificial altar embodies a new formulation of the Waste Land myth and of the rites that structure its narrative, which gives account of a debased society in pursuit of its own annihilation. The life-giving potency of sexuality is not simply an exercise in futility that can only prolong an irreparable state of frustration anymore; it has become a perverse new form of procreation that, like the prosthetics of modern medicine and the artificial intelligence of modern engineering, straightforwardly *replicates* life, replacing all living organisms with inanimate robotics.

A MYTH OF ANNIHILATION

According to the core theory of myth-ritualism, the Waste Land myth is the narrative evolution—into the form of romance—of an ancient fertility rite that enacted the king's sacrificial death to bring about the restoration of the crops. Such process of progressive symbolization—from actually killing the king to merely representing the sacrifice; from a dramatic ritual to a dramatic *performance*, first, and to chivalry romance, later; from romance structure to modern metaphor—seems to revert violently in *V.*, once the representation of the myth entails the occurrence of the original vegetation rite. The myth is literalized to the extreme, in one way; nevertheless, instead of killing the king, a young woman dies, arguably, as a result of the deleterious influence that the Lady V—that is, V—has upon her. It may be argued then, that insofar as V is interpreted as a

[105] Before meeting the inanimate Lady V., Mélanie obtains sexual pleasure from fantasizing about sliding down a roof into her death: "She imagined the sensation often: the feeling of roof-tiles rapidly sliding beneath the hard curve of her rump, the wind trapped under her blouse teasing the new breasts. And then the break: where the lower, steeper slope of the roof began, the point of no return, where the friction against her body would lessen and she would accelerate, flip over to twist the skirt—perhaps rip if off, be done with it, see it flutter away, like a dark kite! —to let the dovetailed tiles tense her nipple-points to an angry red, see a pigeon clinging to the eaves just before flight, taste the long hair caught against her teeth and tongue, cry out…" (395).

signifier of the Grail,[106] what the seeker (i.e., Stencil) eventually discovers is that the Grail has been an agent in the killing of the sacrificial victim; in this case, Mélanie, but, in mythical parameters, the sick king. As both the Grail (in the myth) and the sacrificial death of the king (in the ritual) are meant to bring about the restoration of the Waste Land, Mélanie's tragic fate in *V.* can be interpreted as a rather complicated yet ultimately faithful representation of the Waste Land myth. The radical difference found in Pynchon's novel with regards to how it reinterprets the myth is the fact that Mélanie's sacrifice—enabled by V.—is not described as being futile or vain or incomplete—as it was often the case in post-medieval representations of the Waste Land myth—but is instead presented as a rite that actively seeks the annihilation of life, rather than its restoration.[107] The finality of the ritual is ultimately reverted: it does not seek to mystically restore life, but to destroy whatever little life may remain in the Waste Land.

The core meaning of the myth is thus radically changed. The Waste Lane myth is not represented as a myth that articulates a communal desire for regeneration that cannot be obtained in the modern world; it has become a myth that narrates a global "dream of annihilation." Olderman summarizes: "the mystery of V. is the mystery of why we pursue our own destruction" (124), and such is the new "stencilzed" version of the myth. (Pynchon *V.* 228). This transformation, of course, entails a new, debased consideration of myth as a kind of narrative curiously similar to the "tall stories" that Profanes tells to the girls he wants to "screw" (142):

> He told her about the alligators; Angel, who had a fertile imagination too, added detail, color. Together on the stoop they hammered together a myth. Because *it wasn't born from fear of thunder, dreams, astonishment at how the crops kept dying after harvest and coming up again every spring*, or anything else very permanent, only a temporary interest, a spur-of-the-moment tumescence, it was a myth rickety and transient as the bandstands the sausage-pepper booths of Mulberry Street. (142, my italics.)

[106] It should be taken into consideration that V. stands in as the textual signifier that alludes to the mythical signified 'Grail'; yet the signifying process in the novel is extraordinary complex, as V. itself operates as the quasi-mythical signified that, as Mattesich notes, "stands for a whole range of possible signifiers, partial objects, fetishes, puzzles, secret codes, and for the novel itself: *V.*" (504). Thus the coalescence of signifiers and signifieds, and the impossibility of discerning between true meaning and how such meaning is represented in the text, is very complexly layered and in fact pervades the entirety of Pynchon's novel.

[107] Hunt notes that, when disguised as the Bad Priest in Malta, V. embodies a religious figure that, far from preaching chastity or reproductive sexuality, actually preaches sterility (Hunt 36-37).

The mockery of the mysticism of myth is quite overt in the narrator's simile: the myth hereby *hammered* is as transitory as a sausage-pepper booth, and yet it is a myth. But transient as it may be, the new conception of myth reveals an undeniable fact about the function of mythology in the modern world: that "a basic assumption about the divine force that holds together the visible and the invisible world had somehow been transformed into only another way of looking at things, another lens, no more or less authoritative than any other" (Braudy 619). As Braudy writes, such loss in the faith of providence—as the mystic force that underlies the mythic narrative—took place sometime between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Braudy 619), but it was in the middle of the twentieth century when Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno argued that myth was not a prior stage of the collective mind that preceded the Enlightenment, but rather a different form of Enlightenment.[108] In the post-modern world, myth is not born out of the fear of the thunder; it mocks the thunder and wishes for the crops to never come up again. It has become "stencilzed" to represent a world in which the cure—the cure for the Maimed King and for the Waste Land; that is, the answer to Perceval's question—is known from the start, for it is known to be nothing but the empty illusion created by a meaningless fictive tale. The true knowledge of life is ten revealed as the absolute inexistence of any form of transcendence:

> 'Paola, did you know I have been blowing a silly line all this time. Mister Flab the original, is me. Lazy and taking for granted some wonder drug someplace to cure that town, to cure me. Now there isn't and never will be. Nobody is going to step down from heaven and square away Roony and his woman, or Alabama, or South Africa or us and Russia. There's no magic words. Not even I love you is magic enough. Can you see Eisenhower telling Malenkov or Khrushchev that? Ho-ho.' (366)

As Olderman explains, "when you strike beneath the skin of any twentieth-century value, you will find Nothing" (143). There are no beliefs beneath the myth, which is from this point regarded as a transitory fiction, ultimately valueless and meaningless. The mystery of V. is structured into a narrative form that represents the Waste Land myth, but in this case, the process of mythical reinterpretation reveals the meaninglessness of myth. The response is to reload, so to speak, the myth with a new transitory meaning that can in fact explain the debasement and anarchy of the post-modern world. And so, at last, the belief in mythology is transformed into a theory of

[108] See p. 166.

conspiracy: "V.'s is a country of coincidence, ruled by a ministry of myth. Whose emissaries haunt this century's streets. Porcépic, Mondaugen, Stencil père, this Maijstral, Stencil fils. Could any of them create a coincidence? Only Providence creates. If the coincidences are real then Stencil as never encountered history at all, but something far more appalling" (Pynchon *V.* 450). Such is the new world "without mythology" (Olderman 137) that the 'wastelanders' of Pynchon's novel inhabit—a world, a Waste Land, where the signifieds that make up the supposedly redemptive mythic tale have been condemned to being forever replaced by a multiplicity of surfaces (Jameson 318).[109] As Tony Tanner eloquently expresses, "if V. can mean everything it means nothing" (*Pynchon* 42):

> The old myths no longer work: they no longer serve significantly to frame or 'scaffold' the contemporary world (…). In their place we have temporary and transient improvisations using the ephemeral detritus of the modern street. *The privileged hierarchies of significance and interpretation of the past must be abandoned*, and we mist look to the overlooked areas of the contemporary world for new sources of meaning—and perhaps new gifts of tongues. (Tanner 55, *Pynchon* my italics.)

Arguably, the new recreation of myth represents the final stage in the gradual collapse of the social function of mythic discourse. Joseph Campbell elucidates in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*: "the problem of mankind today, therefore, is precisely the opposite to that of men in the comparatively stable periods of those great co-ordinating mythologies which *now are known as lies*. Then all meaning was in the group, in the great anonymous forms, none in the self-expressive individual; today no meaning is in the group—none in the world: all is in the individual" (Campbell *Hero* 334, my italics). Once myth loses its value as an instrument for social cohesion—that is to say, once the social unit stops believing in myth, which is then exposed as a lie; that is, a fiction—it becomes merely a form of self-expression, but, as Campbell argues, "from the standpoint of the social unit, the broken-off individual is simply nothing—*waste*" (Campbell 331, my italics). The social function of mythology was already attested as a failure in the modernist and 'after-modernist' (and pre-modernists) texts analyzed in this study, but postmodernist novels such as *V.*, far from faulting the anarchic contemporary

[109] : "V. is all over. V. is all over the wor(l)d. V. is death (when it is all over). Virginia, Victoria, vicious, Vheissu, Vera, venery, Vogelsang, Venus, vectors... V. is all about. V. is what it is all about. Eternal condemnation to the signifier" (McHoul and Wills 168).

world to give account of such failure, put the focus on the failings of mythology *per se* as a true, meaningful discourse.

A HARVEST OF BONES

The literary critic of postmodernism Richard Lehan has argued that modernist and postmodernist novels "differ in their narrative modes: one—involving myth and symbolism, cyclical time, forms of Bergsonian consciousness—was undone by the other. Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, Robert Coover, Don DeLillo, and others systematically undo 'the wasteland myth,' the search for meaning in the historical past, and the belief in a subject—that is, a consciousness that centers meaning" (*City* 266). In *The Waste Land*, myth is used structurally as a relatively fixed system of signs and associated meanings that fabricate a counterfeit relationship of continuity between Dante, the Jacobeans, Baudelaire, and every other cultural, religious, ritual, or historical reference in the poem.[110] In modernism, myth reorders the chaos it fails to redeem. In Pynchon's narratives, myth is perhaps not so much 'undone' as 'remade' because, as Wasson argues, like in modernist texts, "on one level [myth] provides 'plot' structures. On another it becomes a mode of perception, even of vision, which provides the unstable subjective self with a world order that transcends individuality" (14).

Thomas Pynchon's 1966 novella *The Crying of Lot* 49 is the story of a Californian housewife, Oedipa Maas, who, after becoming the co-executor of her old lover's estate, Pierce Inverarity, begins to unravel a worldwide, centuries-old conspiracy orchestrated by a secret underground postal delivery service called the Trystero or Tristero. More explicitly than in *V.*, the functions of the new, postmodernist 'mythical method'—basically to provide plot structure and a vision of the world that transcends the unstable self's individuality, to paraphrase Wasson—appear in the text, inescapable yet debased as they are re-appropriated by conspiracy theory; that is to say, the principles of myth are transformed into the principles of paranoia. While in modernist texts myth controls, orders, gives shape and significance to contemporary futility and anarchy (Eliot "Ulysses" 426), in *The Crying of Lot 49*, so does paranoia: in Pearce's terms, "as

[110] In the same way, the mythology of romance Works as a counterfeit strategy of legitimation for the power ideologies of the dominant classes before the modernist revolution in mythical representation, as critically explored in the first half of this study.

Oedipa picks up fragments of information that lead from her present to the past, she is driven by a stronger and stronger compulsion to connect the fragments into a rational order—to plot a casual sequence of events that would explain the present in terms of the past" (221). She claims herself, about her quest in search of Tristero, that, "she would give them order, she would create constellations" (Pynchon *Crying* 63).

Oedipa's perception of the world "invariably construct[s] paranoia as a world system" (Apner 367), because "what is paranoid here is the doubling of cognition and world-making. A conceptual cluster or generic set is taken apart—laid out as disparate components—and snapped back into place like file-leavings by a magnet. The magnet is paranoid thinking, which assigns logistical purpose and relation to random effluvia" (375). Conspiracy, instead of myth, is understood as "the transcendent systematicity of a higher order of programmed intelligence" (Apner 376); but the Tristero conspiracy organized by paranoia is eloquently signified by the governing metaphors of the 'wasteland novels', namely: sickness, sterility, degeneration, and the futile, now destructive quest. Conspiracy thus takes the form of the Waste Land myth, and the novella ultimately provides a hopeless, destructive answer to the question found at the core of the myth, which, as in *V.*, is known to be disastrous even before the quest begins. As Stencil explains about himself and his quest:

> His random movements before the war had given way to a great single movement from inertness to—if not vitality, then at least activity. Work, the chase—for it was V. he hunted—far from being a means to glorify God and one's own godliness (as the Puritans believe) was for Stencil grim, joyless; a conscious acceptance of the unpleasant for no other reason than that V. was there to track down. (55)

The quest, destructive as it is, becomes the only way to overcome or, rather, to *disguise* the world's inanimateness. The quest provides an "acquired sense of animateness" (Pynchon *V.* 55), thus becoming no longer an action, heroic or not, but a state of being, a state of existing, which allows for the world's inanimateness to be experienced as "a great single movement" (55). Regeneration is no longer the teleological purpose of such movement, however. Literary postmodernism, as Geyh advances, has launched "the most comprehensive and convincing critiques of many of the grand narratives of modernity" (3-4); and, as already explained, one of the grand narratives of modernity—that is to say, one of the 'metanarratives' of modernity—is the

belief in myth as the expression of a transcendental cosmos.[111] In postmodernist narratives such as *The Crying of Lot 49*, the alleged underlying significance of myth, i.e., its ritualistic, life-giving potency, is brought to the forefront; the ritualistic dimension of myth is represented literally and, as a result, it becomes yet another form of representation, immanent and transient as any other narrative; one form among the multiplicity of surfaces that has replaced "depth" in postmodernist texts (Jameson 318).

In *The Great Gatsby*, the mythical Waste Land takes the form of a post-industrial New York City where the space of production economy has been transformed, in the wake of financial capitalism, into a (symbolic) farm that grows ashes.[112] In *The Waste Land*, the rotting corpses of First World War victims sprout and breed lilacs with the arrival of springtime. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, both images of perverse, death-driven fertility pervade, conflating in Tony Jaguar's "harvest of bones" (Pynchon; *Crying* 42), which he sold at a loss to Pierce Inverarity. But the traditional wasteland imagery is radically transformed. The (metaphorical) farm of (symbolic) ashes in *The Great Gatsby* is replaced in Pynchon's novel into a (metaphorical) farm in which, in fact, the (real) bones of World War II soldiers are harvested to produce bone charcoal, a soil enhancement product; that is, a *fertilizer*, which is usually manufactured from carbonized cattle bone and widely used in the Sugar Refining and Water Treatment Industries. In Pynchon's text, human bone charcoal is used in the filter of a branch of cigarettes, and as a water filter in Lake Inverarity. Moreover, the (real) story of the harvested bones, dug out of a lake in Italy, where a handful of American troops had been thrown by German soldiers in 1943, is in fact repeating, as if it were a stanza in *The Waste Land*, the plot of a Jacobean revenge play, *The Courier's Tragedy*, which is another key element in either the Tristero conspiracy, or Oedipa's paranoia. The relationship of continuity manipulated by Eliot's "mythical method" between Europe in the 1920s and Jacobean drama is thus paralleled in Pynchon's novella by the relationship of continuity manipulated by the Tristero conspiracy between America in the 1950s and Jacobean drama; and, regardless of whether the connection between myth and conspiracy arguably parodies the modernist "mythical method," Pynchon's text undoubtedly relies on modernist literary practice in order to create meaning and structure plot. Yet, once human bones are harvested and purchased by a fertilizer enterprise, what once was symbolic in *The Waste Land*—the notion that the reborn land

[111] See p. 362.
[112] See p. 250.

in springtime remains a spiritually dead land—becomes literal in Pynchon. The massacre of soldiers in World War II literally results in the fertilization of the land. As a kind of perverse fertility ritual, the bones buried in the Waste Land are processed and commercialized to ensure the fruitfulness of the land. Yet predictably, such mystical life-giving potency is encompassed in an incidental, transient signifier articulating a conspiracy: the story of the bones is the story of a Jacobean play; just one of the infinite possible signifiers that compose the plot, that is, the representation of myth in the novel which, effectively, could be as meaningless and random as a paranoid delusion.

A SIMULACRUM OF ROMANCE

This representation of myth, in fact, entails the undermining of a traditional world-view, incarnated in ancient mythology, which had somehow survived in modernism, but is thoroughly subverted in postmodernism. Northrop Frye summarizes Word representation in traditional romance thus: "the opposite poles of the cycles of nature are assimilated to the opposition of the hero and his enemy. The enemy is associated with winter, darkness, confusion, sterility, moribund life, and old age, and the hero with spring, dawn, order, fertility, vigor, and youth" (*Anatomy* 187-8). Yet in *The Crying of Lot 49*, it is Tristero—that is, the object pursued, like V.,—that becomes associated with the notions traditionally corresponding to the quester's enemy. The hero is then represented as pursuing his own destruction; the quest is no longer impossible or wasteful, but actively annihilating; and as such, it is emblematized in *The Crying of Lot 49* by the ever-present acronym W.A.S.T.E., which stands for "we await silently Tristero's empire." This acronym designates the secret delivery system identified as the Tristero conspiracy, and so Oedipa realizes:

> With her own eyes she had verified a WASTE system: seen two WASTE postmen, a WASTE mailbox, WASTE stamps, WASTE cancellations. And the image of the muted post horn all but saturated the Bay Area. Yet she wanted it all to be a fantasy—some clear result of her several wounds, needs, dark doubles. She wanted Hilarius to tell her she was some kind of a nut and needed a rest, and that there was no Trystero. She wanted to know why the chance of its being real should menace her so. (Pynchon *Crying* 91)

In Frye's terms, romance as a literary mode is marked by "[its] perennially childlike quality (…), its extraordinarily persistent nostalgia, its search for some kind of imaginative golden age in time or space" (186). But in Pynchon's text the search for a golden age—all throughout this study exposed as irretrievably lost—is replaced by the search for a conspiracy, dark and menacing to the extent of having the quester wish that her pursued object were in fact the result of her own wounds and "dark doubles," while she still refuses to give up the search. Traditionally, and as demonstrated throughout this dissertation, models of world representation have always distinguished between earthly paradise and Waste Land, the latter being perceived, in Frederic Jameson's words, as "the end product of curse and enchantment, black magic, baleful spells, and ritual desolation" (*Political* 97). Such a notion, as mythological thought in general terms,[113] presupposes a binary opposition between paradisal garden and corrupted Waste Land, which novels such as *V.* and *The Crying of Lot 49* disrupt precisely by subverting the redeeming force of the romantic quest. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa, like Stencil is *V.*, is aware that the Waste Land pre-exists her quest, and will remain a blighted land once her mission is completed. The Waste Land is now both, the origin of the hero's journey and the final destination, for, as Lehan notes, in postmodernist texts, "the wasteland quest plays itself out in an entropic landscape" (*City* 266). The Eden/Waste Land antinomy is no longer functional within the romance-structure of postmodern novels, and thus the world view of romance mythology is revealed at last to be—as argued in this study—merely an "ideologeme" in the Jamesonian sense, that is, "a historically determinate conceptual or semic complex which can project itself variously in the form of a 'value system' or 'philosophical concept,' or in the form of a protonarrative, a private or collective narrative fantasy" (Jameson *Political* 102).

In Pynchon's novels, the protonarrative in question—the quest myth—remains functional within the structure of the text, but it is no longer represented as expressing a natural precondition of the world that is attempted (and failed) to be recovered; it is instead overtly exposed as a historically-determined social phenomenon, thus fabricated, *fake*, and definitely immanent. The representation of romance achieves thus the level of simulacrum, having "no relation to any reality whatsoever" (Baudrillard 6).[114] The reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth in *V.* and *The Crying of Lot 49* does not simply transform or subvert the meaning of the original medieval myth (already

[113] See p. 148.
[114] See p. 89.

reversed over the centuries from myth of regeneration to myth of degeneration). On the contrary, by actually adapting and assimilating the structural, ordering principles of the modernist mythical paradigm into the principles of conspiracy, these novels remodel myth so as to represent it merely an expression of paranoia. Paranoia is thus configured as a "world system" (Apner 140), in which the annihilating mythical quest not only "plays itself out in an entropic landscape" (Lehan *City* 266), but also and to an entropic end:

> The men inside the action room wore black mohair and had pale, cruel faces- They watched her come in, trying each to conceal his thoughts. Loren Passerine, on his podium, hovered like a puppet-master, his eyes bright, his smile practised and relentless. He stared at her, smiling, as if saying, I'm surprised you actually came. Oedipa sat alone, towards the back of the room, looking at the napes of necks, trying to guess which one was her target, her enemy, perhaps her proof. An assistant closed the heavy door on the lobby windows and the sun. She heard a lock snap shut; the sound echoes a moment. Passerine spread his arms in a gesture that seemed to belong to the priesthood of some remote culture; perhaps a descending angel. The auctioneer cleared his throat. Oedipa settled back, to await to crying of lot 49. (Pynchon *Crying* 126-7).

As Olderman notes, at the end of Oedipa's quest, "not only is the threat of a malicious conspiracy kept alive in those final moments, but even at best, even if we are waiting for Tristero to be the revelation of a new alternative, a new mode of communication, we are undoubtedly beset by terror as we wait" (Olderman 148). And so the annihilating mythical quest is revealed as endless, as *The Crying of Lot 49* finishes with the interruption of Pentecost, the festivity which traditionally sets the beginning of the quest.[115] Quilligan explains:

[115] On the Pentecost, Sir Launcelot's declares: "I will that ye wit that this same day shell the adventures of the Sangrail, that is called the holy vessel, begin" (Malory II 241). The night before Galahad receives the order of knighthood (239), and it is during the celebratory feast on the next day that Galahad accomplishes a set of marvellous deeds that signal him as the rightful knight to find the Grail. He sits on the Siege Perilous without being cursed, which designates him as "THE BEST KNIGHT OF THE WORLD" (243), and later on manages to draw the sword from the stone—a sword cursed so that he that will fail to take it will suffer an injury, which, of course, Galahad avoids. And so King Arthur dictates: "Sir, ye be welcome, for ye shall move many good knights to the quest of the Sangrail, and ye shall achieve that never knights might to an end" (244); and Galahad realizes himself that it is his mission to heal his grandfather King Pelles, one of the several Maimed-King figures recurrent in Malory's romances: "Now have I that sword that sometime was the good knight's, Balin le Savage, and he was a passing good man of his hands; and with this sword he slew his brother Balan, and that was great pity, for he was a good knight, and either slew other through a dolorous stroke that Balin gave unto my grandfather King Pelles, the which is not yet whole, nor not shall be till I heal him" (245).

> When on the last page we discover that Oedipa arrives at a stamp auction improbably taking place on a Sunday, to hear the auctioneer's 'crying' of lot 49, we are asked to remember that the forty-ninth day alter Easter, or the seventh Sunday, is Pentecost, or the celebration of the day Christ reappeared to his disciples to endow them with the special linguistic abilities necessary for bringing his estate into stelliferous Meaning. They learned how to execute his last will and testament, by writing and disseminating the New Testament, of his Word.
> By becoming the executor of Pierce Inverarity's last will and testament, Oedipa comes close to a kind of sacred discipleship. (188)

The quest is turned upside down when, only at its end, it finally allows the identification between Oedipa and Galahad, once she, as Quilligan notes, "comes close to a kind of sacred discipleship" not altogether different from Galahad's quasi-divine knighthood. It is rather eloquent that the echoes of Pentecost in Oedipa's final moments of terror parallel her quest to Galahad's in Molary's works; that is, the *successful* Holy Quest found in the later romances, as opposed to the knightly failure of Perceval found in Chrétien de Troyes's original version. The reference to Malory is significant in two ways: firstly, it exacerbates the contrast between Galahad's faith and success, and Oedipa's fear and aimlessness; secondly, Pynchon's novel uses as source material for its process of mythical representation not the earlier extant romance, but a highly reinterpreted late-medieval version. This circumstance ultimately underlines the transient nature of myth by proving it to be an ideological construct made out of changing and transitory fictions. In this context, "the priesthood of some remote culture" (Pynchon *Crying* 127)—the shamanistic practice allegedly found in the ritual origin of the myth—is but the (perhaps vain) performance of an auctioneer who might reveal that "there would either be a transcendent meaning, or only earth (…) [that] the bones of the GIs at the bottom of Lake Inverarity were there either for a reason that mattered to the world, or for skin divers and cigarette smokers" (125-6). There is no way to know for sure. There is no path to reach transcendence. Only uncertainty remains.

AN ALLEGORY OF AN ALLEGORY

As it is obvious, Oedipa Maas is named alter the mythical Greek king of Thebes, Oedipus. As McConnell argues, "like her namesake, Oedipa finds herself caught up in

the attempt to solve a riddle whose answer threatens her own sanity and inmost life more than she first suspects" (170); yet, the feminizing of the tragic hero contributes to complicate the character's mythical ambivalence which, as in the case of other heroes analyzed in this fourth part of the dissertation, is a key constituent in the process of mythical reinterpretation that takes place in American literature after the 1920s. McConnell describes: "Oedipa combines the (stereotyped but powerful) attributes of masculine and feminine, intellectual and passional, active quester and passive object or victim of the quest in a way that deepens and generalizes the self-bafflement and self-destruction of her own intelligence" (170). Indeed, as so many other characters already studied, Oedipa as a textual signifier does not refer to one single verified mythical signified. She is, first and foremost, the quester; that is, she is evidently counterpart of the mythical Grail Knight. But as McConnell notes, she is both, "active quester and passive victim of the quest"; that is to say, she is both (like Wayne and O'Connor and Hobbs and McMurphy and even Stencil), Knight and King simultaneously.

Initially, Oedipa self-identifies with the folk-tale character of Rapunzel, the 'maiden-in-the-tower'[116] who lets down her long hair so that the prince can climb into her prison and rescue her. Literally, Oedipa "conned herself into the curious, Rapunzel-like role of a pensive girl somehow, magically, prisoner among the pines and salt fogs of Kinneret, looking for somebody to say hey, let down your hair" (Pynchon *Crying* 12). She is thus the damsel in distress awaiting a prince that will deliver her from her prison and, as she narrates her own story as if it were a revision of a traditional folk-tale (that is, as Oedipa consciously mythologizes herself), the tale changes suddenly and drastically: "only when Pierce had got maybe halfway up, her lovely hair turned, thought some sinister sorcery, into a great unanchored wig, and down he fell, on his ass. But dauntless, perhaps using one of his many credit cards for a shim, he'd slipped the lock on her tower door and come up the conchlike stairs" (12-3). The folk-tale is brought up to date and ridiculed; the romantic fairy-tale quality of the prince's heroic (and magical) climb up the princess's hair is replaced by Pierce's guile in breaking and entering the tower, slipping the lock with "one of his many credit cards." The credit card is a clear emblem of the vanity and random representativeness of the consumerist society represented in the novel; it is a (not-iconic) signifier that stands in the place of money—which itself is a (not-iconic) signifier that stands in the place of value—that is

[116] This refers to the folk-tale typology, according to the The Aarne-Thompson classification system.

however employed not for its intended mundane purpose (to buy things) but to complete the romance—or in this case, folk-tale—hero's task: to deliver the maiden in the tower.

Oedipa's initial self-mythologizing thus entails a reinterpretation (and ridicule[117]) of a traditional narrative, and it places the character in the position of ailing passive object in Pierce's active heroic mission. In such a narrative structure, Oedipa—named, as it is obvious, after a mythical regicidal king whose unwitting crimes (regicide and incest) have brought a terrible plague to his city, Thebes—stands in the place of the Fisher King in the Waste Land Myth; yet, after the contemplation of Remedios Varo's painting, she understands that the maidens in the tower are not simply waiting to be rescued, but in fact "embroidering a king of tapestry which spilled out of slit windows and into a void, seeking hopelessly to fill the void: for all the other buildings and creatures, all the waves, ships and forests of the earth were contained in this tapestry, and the tapestry was the world" (13). Oedipa's realization places her simultaneously at both extremes of the traditional narrative: on the one hand, she is one of the maidens embroidering the tapestry that is the entire world and from which "there'd be no escape" (13); on the other hand, the central plot of the novel places her in the role of the "knight of deliverance" that she awaited from her tower. Oedipa, as a character built upon a set of mythical or quasi-mythical archetypes, is ambivalent: one signifier with no single verifiable signified, for she is Oedipus and Rapunzel; the Maimed King waiting to be delivered, and the Knight who must complete the heroic quest. Once again, meaning is not generated by the relationship between Oedipa and one objective external mythical mirage, but through the concatenations of the multiple signifiers that make up the whole text and that allow for Oedipa to simultaneously embody the passive object and active subject of the quest.[118]

Oedipa's linear quest, as Pearce explains, constitutes a purposeful plot that contrasts with the "plotless plotting" (223) of history's "senseless motion" (223). The quest is Oedipa's desperate attempt to connect the dispersed fragments of information into the rational order intended by the modernist mythical method: "to plot a casual

[117] Before picking the lock of Oedipa's alegorical tower, Pierce tries to rescue her in the traditional way, according to Oedipa's mythologizing of their story; however, after her hair is transformed into an "unanchored wig," he falls on his backside. This pun seems to coincide with the view of certain critics, such as Tony Tanner, who have interpreted the meaning of Oedipa Mass's name as primarily sardonic, as thus standing for "Oedipa my ass" (Tanner 60), which would invalidate a sensible understanding of Oedipa's name as signaling the character as counterpart of Oedipus. Whatever the case may be, the text relies on myth to construct meaning, be that to legitimize or undermine the character's mythical characterization.

[118] See note 82 in the previous chapter (p. 363).

sequence of events that would explain the present in terms of the past" (Pearce 221). But Oedipa fails: "In the end, that is, Oedipa stands out clearly against Pierce's formless San Narciso as does the path of her movement from the senseless motion that threatens to absorb it. But as the figure stands out against the ground, it is also disconnected from it" (Pearce 224). The terror she feels at the end of the novel is born out of this dissonance. Oedipa trusts in the order of mythical narratives to make sense of a senseless world, and so she struggles for her quest to be sensible and linear and purposeful. Her quest constitutes "the simple plotting of the novel's action and the protagonist's development—the rational plan, chronological sequence, progressive development of Oedipa's quest—to which is added the more rational but incredibly complicated plot of The Courier's Tragedy" (Pearce 221). Both Oedipa's rational plan and the plot of *The Courier's Tragedy* constitute the instances of traditional linear and purposeful narrative found in myth, coincidental in the present and the past, constant in their meaning; and so Oedipa clings to the hope that her plotting can in fact give order—and thus, she believes, meaning—to a world in the brink of annihilation: "If it was really Pierce's attempt to leave an organized something behind after his own annihilation, then it was part of her duty, wasn't it, to bestow life on what had persisted, to try and be what Driblette was, the dark machine in the centre of the planetarium, to bring the estate into pulsing stelliferous Meaning, all in a soaring dome around her?" (Pynchon *Crying* 56).

Oedipa's quasi-fanatical sense of duty is not altogether different from the sense of religious purpose that defines a mythical character such as Galahad; yet, once again, the process of mythical reinterpretation is cruelly perverted when Oedipa's Galahad-like mission—no less than "to bestow life on what had persisted"—is expressed in mechanizing terms, as she wishes to be "the dark machine in the centre of the planetarium." She can only aspire to *project a representation* of the world as found in myth, but such representation cannot bestow life. Mattessich argues that, as the Knight of Deliverance,

> [Oedipa is] essentially a machine, a kind of information-processing computer that organizes or links together the elements of the textual world through which 'she' seeks answers to the mystery of the Tristero and the underground postal system W.A.S.T.E, much in the same way that Maxwell's Demon 'sorts' molecules and 'connects the world of thermodynamics to the world of information flow.'(par.3)

As Bruce Clarke notes, "the daemonic is an allegory of allegory" (69), and so is Oedipa. Her identification with Rapunzel operates as the allegory of the Varo's triptych, which is itself the allegory of the conspiracy that Oedipa seeks to unravel. John Nefastis explains what the artificial intelligence of Maxwell's Demon is:

> The Demon could sit in a box among air molecules that were moving at all different random speeds, and sort out the fast molecules from the slow ones. Fast molecules have more energy that slow ones. Concentrate enough of them in one place and you have a region of high temperature. You can then use the difference in temperature between this hot region of the box and any cooler region, to drive a heat engine. Since the Demon only sat and sorted, you wouldn't have put any real work into system. So you would be violating the Second Law of Thermodynamics, getting something for nothing, causing perpetual motion.
> 'Sorting isn't work?' Oedipa said. (...)
> 'It's mental work,' Koteks said, 'but not work in the thermodynamic sense.' (Pynchon *Crying* 59).

THE CYCLE OF DEATH

As an allegory of allegory, Maxwell Demon serves to illustrate how mythical representation functions in *The Crying of Lot 49*: a narrative that reproduces a mythical pattern does not *create* as much as it simply sorts out, separating and rearranging the parts of a pre-existing narrative. The ending result is not (cannot be) regeneration, but "perpetual motion." Oedipa calls this madness (60), for in fact it implies the dissonance between signifiers that Jameson identifies as symptomatic of postmodern schizophrenia, because if meaning is construed through the connections of multiple signifiers, "when the links of the signifying chain snap, then we have schizophrenia in the form of a rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers" (Jameson 324). To avoid madness—or meaninglessness—Oedipa must reestablish the chain of meaning; that is, she must connect all the clues that make up the Tristero conspiracy; she must "give them order (…) [to] create constellations" (Pynchon *Crying* 63). So she pursues her quest, hoping that "it might redeem her a little from inertia" (56). Whereas Stencil embraces the quest as the self-destructive dream of annihilation, Oedipa anticipates redemption against all hope, regardless of the clear signs that foreshadow the futility of her quest, such as the aversion she feels towards the highway, right after she begins her journey from her

suburban town Kinneret towards the mythically-named, in a striking combination of pagan and Christian references, San Narciso, the epicentre of Pierce Inverarity's empire:

> Oedipa resolved to pull in at the next motel she saw, however ugly, stillness and four walls having at some point become preferable to this illusion of speed, freedom, wind in your hair, unreeling landscape—it wasn't. What the road really was, she fancied, was this hypodermic needle, inserted somewhere ahead into the vein of a freeway, a vein nourishing the mainliner LA, keeping it happy, coherent, protected from pain, or whatever passes, with a city, for pain. (Pynchon *Crying* 16)

As Ronald Primeau exposes in his book *Romance of the Road: the Literature of the American Highway*, road narratives—so prominent in American fiction after the 1950s—draw from the mythic hero journey as described by Joseph Campbell (Primeau 6), consisting of three phases: departure, initiation and return.[119] In this view, Oedipa's quest begins as a highway quest, an archetypal hero journey which, even though it identifies Oedipa with "the redeeming hero, the carrier of the shining blade, whose blow, whose touch, whose existence will liberate the land" (Campbell *Hero* 11),[120] it also recognizes the vanity of her mission. The highway is not a road to freedom and deliverance, but an anaesthetic that conceals (without truly relieving) the pain that afflicts the "infected city" (Pynchon *Crying* 80).

Such morbid mythologizing of the modern, "infected" city as a Waste Land is once again rooted in the modernist tradition but, as expected, it is exacerbated to the extreme in *The Crying of Lot 49*. As Campbell explains, drawing for the writing of Professor Arnold J. Toynbee, and right after he directly quotes *The Waste Land*, "only birth can conquer death—the birth, not of the old thing again, but of something new. Within the soul, within the body social, there must be—if we are to experience long survival—a continuous 'recurrence of birth'" (*Hero* 11-12). The recurrence of birth that arguably informs the cyclical structure of *The Waste Land* was demonstrated to be the recurrence of merely "a little life" (Eliot *TWL* 7)—feeble, sickly and swollen with death. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, however, the "recurrence of birth" that should result

[119] See Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, part 1: "The Monomyth" (Novato, California: New World Library, 2008). See also pp. 117-118.

[120] It bears mentioning that this quote from Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* is immediately followed by the following excerpt from "What the Thunder Said": "Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit / There is not even silence in the mountains / But dry sterile thunder without rain / There is not even solitude in the mountains / But red sullen faces sneer and snarl / From doors of mudcracked houses" (Eliot, qt. in Campbell *Hero* 11).

from the hero's journey has plainly transformed into the 'recurrence of death', for such is the final discovery that Oedipa unveils, when she consults Genghis Cohen, the best philatelist in the Los Angeles area, about Pierce Inverarity's stamps. He refuses to cooperate with her and provide information about the postal conspiracy that Oedipa investigates, but he tells her a revealing story about the wine he offers her to drink. It is a wine made with fermented dandelions that he had plucked from a cemetery (which was cleared precisely to build the San Narciso freeway that initially defines Oedipa's quest) which had been bred by human bones. Once again, corpses have bloomed, like the body Stetson planted, but this time they have done so literally and explicitly, perpetuating a cycle of death that is unstoppable. Because the new life brought out from death, that is, the dandelions bred out of a land swollen with the dead, are successively killed, fermented to be—morbidly, arguably in a form of refined cannibalism—ingested by the hero in the form of wine. Cohen naively (or cruelly) considers this process as a renewal of life: "You see, in spring, when the dandelions begin to bloom again, the wine goes through a fermentation. As if they remember" (68). He attributes to the dandelions the human soulful capacity for memory that Eliot assigns to the corpses buried beneath the "forgetful snow" (Eliot *TWL* 6), so that remembering their birth in springtime, the dandelions ferment. But this renewal of life—of the perverse little life of the dandelions growing out of human graves—triggers a renewal of death: the fermentation of the dandelions, literally grown off the human bones that are then overtly used as fertilizer and later ingested by Oedipa in the moment when she sadly realizes that the wine goes through a fermentation "as if their home cemetery in some way still did exist, in a land where you could somehow walk, and not the East San Narciso Freeway, and bones still could rest in peace, nourishing ghosts of dandelions, no one to plough them up. As if the dead really do persist, even in a bottle of wine" (Pynchon *Crying* 68).

Oedipa at last realizes that she cannot fulfil her mission; she cannot "bestow life on what had persisted" (56), for not even the dead can persist, because death is constantly being renewed in the Waste Land. Oedipa wishes for the situation symbolically described in "The Burial of the Dead": for the dead to remain buried nourishing new flowers. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, the dead escape the earth but cannot even persist in a bottle of wine, for the living drink them to be nourished by death. Death has, once again literally, become the source of life in every sense. Consequently, in myth-critical terms, this reveals the impossibility of achieving any sort of

transcendence or regeneration through myth. Oedipa's quest—the linear plot of her mythical narrative—becomes an instrument for the complete annihilation of life. Reliance on the durability and transcendence of mythical narratives proves to be not only futile, but also terrifying for Oedipa. The quest—the linear traditional plot that articulates romance as the quintessential narrative mode—is exposed as a mere fiction, not only in representation but in origin, revealed as essentially unreal insofar as it, at best, merely provides a "sense of animateness" (*V.* 55) in a world plunged down into an irrevocable process towards inanimateness and perpetual, irreparable, and ever-renewing lifelessness. Wasson concludes:

> [The] mythologizing [process] forces the contingent into a pattern of the fiction of cyclical history (…) [but it] is no better than the fictions of continuity, progress or the Hegelian fiction of history endowed with reason or spirit. Cyclical history, so often embodied in the structure of the quest, (…) [implies that] history is mechanical repetition. Mythic forms like conspiracy theories of history make the world 'manageably inanimate'. (19)

Such arguable self-delusion is exposed in *The Crying of Lot 49* at the end of Oedipa's quest, in a way that recalls Stencil's self-awareness with regards to his wilful pursuit of a "dream of annihilation". Hunt explains that, "with the prospect of ending the quest, of making the connections, comes an apocalyptic vision of an absolute threat to life. The threat is not simply from death which, metaphorically, would be right enough, but from the take-over of the inanimate that promises to reduce the whole human enterprise to something utterly meaningless" (41). Hence, mythical reinterpretation cannot repair a generalized state of being defined by the *absence* of all forms of life, included death as an inextricable part of life, be that as its necessary end, or an inevitable recurrence in a cyclical understanding of life. The postmodernist reinterpretations of the Waste Land myth explored in this last chapter thus conclude the reconsiderations of mythical representation that invalidate the belief in the cosmogonist functionality of myth as it is recreated in literature. For myth as a source of order—and thus, structure in narrative—is no longer represented following the vision of mythologists such as Mircea Eliade, who have argued, as Robert Segal summarizes, that in the mythical tale, "explanation turns out a mere means to an end, which is regeneration" (Segal *Myth* 55). From this perspective, mythical representation necessarily brings about the (re)generation of life, as all forms of life renewal require the annulment of (historical) time; that is to say, they require the recreation of a mythic

time that is activated each time a myth is heard, read or (re)enacted (55). Each reactivation of a myth is believed to repeat a cosmogonist archetype which, inasmuch as it is found outside of History, can in fact generate new life (Eliade 89-90). Yet, all the instances of reinterpretation of the pre-modern myth of the Waste Land analyzed in this study insist on recreating myth *within* history, After the possibility of regeneration, that is, the teleological (transcendent) purpose of the Waste Land myth, has been denied and subverted almost time and again in the literary tradition, what the process of mythical representation elucidates is the opposite of mysticism: the transitory, ideologically-biased and definitely immanent functionality of myth as a simple narrative device, employed to structure plot and construct meaning, which has simply been institutionalized (through repetition) along tradition, and yet has been simultaneously subverted and ideologically challenged through literary representation from the post-medieval to the post-modern.

CONCLUSIONS

DEMYTHOLOGIZING HISTORY

The first part of this study explored how the political anxieties of early-modern England were articulated in a process of mythical representation that paradoxically depicted a process of deconsecrating kingship, by subverting the mythical structures that 'emplotted' historical writing in Tudor England. Thus the myth-critical analysis carried out in this study was initially focused on examining the intersections of myth, history and romance in early drama. Kingly figures in the three plays selected—Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*, and William Shakespeare's *Richard II* and *The Tempest*, that is, two histories and a romance—were explored from a myth-critical perspective as archetypal 'tragic kings,' following the understanding that historical process were in fact represented at the time (both in historiography and in drama) as partaking in the cyclical, repetitive and in fact ritual structure of mythopoeia, hence giving form to (at least apparently) mythical, archetypal narratives that were however subverted in the cases explored. These dramatizations were argued to represent a process in which mythical recurrence articulates a state of political, historical and moral degeneration, an argument which initiated the main thesis of this study: the ideologically-subversive immanence of a degenerative representation of the pre-modern myth of the Waste Land across the Anglo-American literary tradition.

White's notion of 'emplotment' was crucial to fully comprehend the mythical dimension of the texts examined in this part. For indeed, the mythical substratum of the plays explored is a consequence of the necessity of historical events to be transformed into *stories* so that they can be explanatory and understandable. This argument is a constant all throughout this study, as the functionality of mythology cannot be separated from the necessity to make the chaos and anarchy of human existence comprehensible

within the limits of human consciousness. In the case of early-modern historiography, this necessity determines that medieval history is reshaped to accommodate a culturally-provided category, romance, which thus comes to structure historiographical narratives and, by extension, the history plays that are based on them.

Such is undoubtedly the case of Marlowe's *Edward II*, which presents a situation where the king is rhetorically depicted as being sick and thus having caused the wasting of his plagued land. The rebels who declare war on the king, in their own words, are attempting to mend him and save the realm. They codify in mythical terms a process of political revolt and eventual restoration that seems to reconcile the dominant providential theory of kingship with the incipient proto-constitutional counter-discourses, by superimposing a pre-modern mythical pattern on the story of a seemingly unnatural revolt against the lawful king. The result however is far from conciliatory, as the naturalized cosmology of the mythical structure that articulates the historical events performed onstage is in fact counter-effected by the exposure of the gruesome violence inherent to war, which undercuts the audience's expectations of mythical restoration. In consequence, the mythological themes and structures of the play are revealed as a transitory and contradictory strategy of legitimization servicing a specific political agenda. The king's sacrificial killing is far too brutal and horrifying, and hence constitutes an act of desecration that irreversibly disassociates the restoration of political order from the preternatural and spiritual equilibrium of transcendent mythology. Such equilibrium is instead exposed as a vain fiction, nothing but a rhetorical strategy that idealizes and justifies the violence and power politics that perpetuate the established social structures. Consequently, the very *mythos* that emplots historical narratives to legitimize the authority of those in power begins to be denaturalized. Political order is restored in the figure of the true king's legitimate heir, but there is no illusion of such political restitution being mythically legitimized by means of a preternatural order that organizes and sustains royal authority. The pattern of romance mythology might structure the plot of the play, but it does not contain the meaning, a circumstance which in effect initiates the dramatization of a true mythical change that characterizes the representation of kingship in early modern drama.

As demonstrated throughout this study, myth can be understood as a kind of narrative that articulates the dominant ideology of a group and the teleology of which is thus mainly social. Myth then shapes as a story a communal credo that unifies and structures originally-diverse, hierarchical and conflictive social groups. It is then a

dominant, collectively-accepted narrative that attempts to set the world in order and that, insofar as it fabricates a fully harmonized universe, also brings about a set of social ethics and moral axioms that, insofar as they are drawn from an allegedly immutable preternatural cosmos, condition societal behaviour by naturalizing ethics. Myth then not only explains the world, but it also organizes culture, and, as a consequence, once myth is expressed in literary form, it attempts to set in order the chaos of an experience of life that needs to be condensed, adapted and contained in a conventional narrative pattern to be apprehended. In the case of the plays examined in the first part of this study, mythical structures attempt to organize the chaotic mystery of past events that, being in the past, can never be known outside of representation. Yet once represented in a mythical narrative, the mythical substratum becomes malleable, and as it is a constant in all texts analyzed in this dissertation, the malleability of myth eventually reveals its unreliability as a source of true meaning.

Such is most evidently the case of the Tudor myth as represented in Shakespeare's *Richard II*, in which such mythical narrative is limited to structuring the historical plot, but is in fact reinterpreted so that what was conceived in origin as a narrative of restoration is reshaped into a myth of degeneration that articulates in dramatic form England's irreversible transformation from an Eden-like paradise into an irreparable Waste Land. Once again, the events performed onstage result in the restoration of political order, but in mythical terms, the kingdom remains a moral and spiritual Waste Land after the Maimed King has been killed and succeeded. Myth and ritual operate as structuring devices that attempt to set in order a violent and chaotic reality, but both are exposed as futile strategies of legitimization, when Richard's successor Henry disrupts moral order in the exact same way Richard had done, committing the taboo crime of fratricide and thus being condemned to endure Cain's punishment: to become king of the Waste Land, east of Eden. Mythical reinterpretation is perverse, as the structure of the myth re-enacts the king's primal crime so that instead of finalizing in a moment of regeneration, the representation of the myth aggravates the state of mystical and spiritual destitution that plights the Waste Land depicted onstage. Effectively, Shakespeare's play dramatizes the re-establishment of political order, but such restoration takes place in a Waste Land where England's 'other Eden' cannot ever be recovered. It articulates thus a mythical change that occurs in the transition into historical modernity, which is textually signified as an inversion of the ideological movement of romance: instead of representing the transition from Waste Land to Eden,

the mythical change depicted in *Richard II* and the other plays analyzed in the first part of this study represent England's *modern* transformation from Eden to unredeemable Waste Land. Thus these plays in fact reinterpret the mythical narratives they exploit and challenge in effect the dominant discourses articulated by such mythical narratives, simply by representing myth and ritual as futile, emptied-out, frustrated and ultimately incapable of providing a stable, unifying and uncontested meaning. Politically, such annulment of mythical transcendence results in an invalidation of kingship as a divinely-sanctioned institution, and myths of kingship are revealed as power ideologies that are simultaneously enacted and evacuated of transcendence, as it happens in all texts explored along this study. The inextricable identification between royal authority and providential governance is thus effectively deconstructed, which constitutes a process of mythical subversion inseparable from the context in which the text is produced.

The case of *The Tempest* is slightly different, as the *mythos* of romance is not mediated by the filter of historiography but represented in a very straightforward way. On the basis that the 'mode' of romance is defined by its theme rather than by its form, it can be argued that in romance ideology, political restoration and natural (and spiritual) regeneration are conceived as inextricable, and as such they are apparently represented in Shakespeare's last play. However, such apparent representation is just that: a *representation* within the play, which replaces ritual with a masque, that is, with an image of ritual that befits the world without transcendence that has resulted from the mythical change occurred in the transition into historical modernity. Romance then also functions in *The Tempest* as an emplotment strategy, employed by Prospero to structure and attribute meaning to a political narrative that takes place in a world where spiritual redemption is no longer possible. The play dramatizes a conflict between a chaotic, anarchic reality, and the limitations of myth as an ideological strategy to impose form, order and meaning to such an unredeemable life. But the adjustment of life to the moral and magical rules of mythology is presented as transient and fragile, and thus the romance of regeneration that Prospero stages becomes the dramatization of a story of degeneration. Political order, along with its legitimation through romance ideology, is represented as a fake construct that is not preternaturally determined, and cannot result in a regeneration of life because myth exists outside of life. *The Tempest*, along with the other two plays examined in the first part of this study, thus exposes the immanence of myth once it is represented in literature, a revelation which can—and in fact does—

evacuate all traces of legitimizing transcendence from the pre-modern tale and consequently extricates the social organization of power from any mythical allegations of naturalness, preternatural cosmology or any other kind of providentialism.

REMAKING ROMANCE

The second part of this dissertation has analyzed the refashioning of romance and romance mythology along the nineteenth-century, after the so-called 'romance revival' of the eighteen-century, which was coincidental with the birth of gothic literature. Establishing a continuum of meaning with the first part of this study, the analysis of the remade romances of the enlightened British tradition began by examining how the myths of romance were in fact emptied-out of their original meaning in the modern era, and how this meaning was in fact replaced so that the newly rewritten myths could give account of the specific social and ideological context of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Britain. The first step in this process, realized by Horace Walpole's foundational *The Castle of Otranto,* is carried out when the gothic signifiers found in the new romance in fact are made to refer not to a 'true' medieval signified, but to its Renaissance counterfeit. The result is that the new romance in fact re-fakes what was already fake in origin, and so the myths of romance—specifically the Waste Land myth—are represented as immanently meaningless and consequently very easy to be appropriated and re-signified to legitimize any particular dominant discourse or power ideology. The myths of romance are then remade to give account of the new world order and their legitimizing agenda for the political structures that arbitrated feudalism are modified to instead attempt the naturalization of a new social order dominated by mercantilism and the pursuit of private economic profit. Myths that used to resolve dynastic conflicts are then reshaped to negotiate conflicts over the inheritance of money and property and become laced with upper-middle class sentiment.

This form of romance revival and romance evolution, even though it is inextricable in its origins from Gothicism, is however later on aligned with the representation of myths in certain key texts of romanticism along the nineteenth-century. That is certainly the case of Walter Scott's *Waverley,* which presents a rather complex representation of romance structures to narrate a story of cultural and historical

dissolution, but which seems to be presented as perfectly moulded against the traditional pattern of a romance of restoration. As argued, the novel seems to present an irresolvable paradox: the *pessimistic* representation of a *traditional* romance. Such paradox, however, in a process similar but perhaps more explicit than in the case of the plays explored in the first part of this study, in fact exposes the conventions of romance as a deliberate misrepresentation that by emplotting a set of historical events to accommodate the dominant ideology of the ruling class, attempts to legitimate *ex-post facto* a situation of violence, dominion and cultural colonization. Thus the resulting enlightened romance attempts to naturalize and legitimize the social order of Hanoverian England, by making the story of Waverley's politically and socially restorative marriage conform to the shape of a traditional romance of regeneration. Yet, that new romance of domestic triumph that narrates the restoration of the unionist Lowlands of Scotland is directly confronted with an *old* romance, the dynastic myths of which in fact narrate the irreparable wasting of Highland culture. In fact, the enlightened romance of the Lowlands displaces the 'romance of loss' of the Highlands, for both are in fact narrating the same story, that is, emplotting the same history and, as a result, the myth that narrates the restoration of the wasted Lowlands is revealed as a self-interested fabrication aimed at naturalizing the power structures of colonialism.

Such refashioning of myth is represented through a process by means of which the new romance reinterprets the Waste Land myth as devoid of magic and mysticism, representing an ordered society that is no longer in equilibrium with the preternatural forces of cosmos, but that is instead legitimized through the rhetoric of progress. Romance is made overtly malleable and renounces to an archetypal origin; transcendence is replaced with the credo of progress. In the old romance of the Highlands, the legitimizing force of the pre-modern dynastic myth is only temporary, and ends up colonized by the myths of progress. The restoration of the Stuart dynasty to the British throne is literally rewritten into a unionist narrative that installs Waverley, an Englishman, as the rightful heir of the wasted lordship of the Lowlands, reshaping a newly-made myth that is legitimized through (economic) progress. Communal regeneration is not the consequence of mythical transcendence, but of financial prosperity and mercantilist growth. Only commercial success and the pragmatic ethos can restore the new mythical Waste Land, but such restoration is represented in *Waverley* as inextricable from the political and cultural dissolution of a different, parallel Waste Land that not only cannot be recovered by the forces of progress, but that

must in fact remain literally and metaphorically devastated (by progress) to ensure the restitution of the dominant culture, the regeneration of which is irreparably extricated from the mystical, harmonizing *mythos* of old romance.

Consequently, the representation and reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth along the nineteenth-century can only give account of a corrupt ideal of progress that can barely conceal the desolate condition of an enlightened society that was in fact plunging towards the unforeseeable, unprecedented horror of the First World War. That is, in fact, the underlying implication of Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, the epitome of medievalist romance as represented in Victorian poetry, which in fact recounts the inexorableness of a social and political degeneration that was leading the societies of progress towards the unimagined moral and spiritual waste land that would result from the Great War. Hence, Tennyson's *Idylls* constitute the first instance in this study that presents the reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth as a myth of collective degeneration as signifying not the collapse of the old world depicted in pre-modern mythology and unparalleled in historical modernity, but the collapse of historical modernity itself. The *Idylls* are the first example analyzed in this dissertation of the Waste Land myth reinterpreted by aesthetic modernity.

The literary representation of hollow myths that are emptied out of their legitimizing force has been a constant throughout this study; from the nineteenth century onwards, this 'hollowness of myth' is associated with the groundlessness of the ideals of modernity, and, lastly, as it was detailed in the fourth part of this dissertation, it is represented as an inherent characteristic of mythopoeia. In Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, however, the representation of the Waste Land myth depicts the baselessness of Victorian ethics as quintessence of social order, progress and civilization, and they do so by presenting a romance, the regenerative movement of which is explicitly reversed: the wounding of the divine king and the consequent wasting of the kingdom is displaced to become the fatal resolution of the story of Camelot, which, as explained in chapter five, functions in the poems as both metaphor and metonymy of the contemporary British Empire. An ideal of a superior civilization is thus explicitly recreated as a mythical Waste Land that offers no hopes of restoration, for the circular structure of the *Idylls* in fact articulate a social, moral and spiritual descend into chaos. Myths are represented as socially-accepted fictions that can sustain the illusion of civilization only for a short while, simultaneously necessary and futile for warranting social order at a time when the political structures that sustained the social equilibrium were in fact only

a mere representation of power. Camelot and King Arthur are represented as mystical illusions and, meaningfully, their respective transformations into Waste Land and Maimed King reveal that such mythical representations of power and order are in fact condemned to collapse and unleash the annihilating chaos of a world that can no longer be fully ordered, apprehended and contained within the weakening boundaries of mythopoeic thought.

In British literature towards the end of the nineteenth century, myth is not simply presented as immanent and devoid of mysticism; it is represented in the process of losing its most pragmatic functionality as an ordering device that makes it possible to at least *explain* reality. For in fact, such an enlightened teleology begins to crumble along with the other ideals of enlightenment, as it was analysed in the sixth chapter of this dissertation, which explored Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* from a myth-critical perspective. Conrad's novella narrates a story in which the enlightened ideal of a limitless progress results in the deification of the white colonizer, that is, in a process of mystical transformation that is however codified within the rhetoric of degeneration theory. The functionality of romance mythology within the text is circumscribed by this rhetoric, as it presents Marlow's journey is search of Kurtz as a failed, aimless, cyclically degenerative Grail Quest. Consequently, the subversive, overtly degenerative representation of romance mythology articulates a commentary on the myths of enlightenment, that is, on the legitimizing narratives of scientific and philosophical enlightenment that in truth serve the same purpose as mythopoeia: to naturalize as inevitable a particular understanding of the world that presents a status quo of social injustice as immune to intervention. This hypothesis, as argued in the analysis of *Heart of Darkness*, is easily translatable to a context of colonization, in which both the discourse of progress and mythology coalesce to present the enlightened man in the likeness of a god. Yet Conrad's enlightened/divine man-god, Kurtz, is re-characterized in the light of degeneration theory, and so the ideal he stands for is also redefined as deleterious.

As in other texts examined, the pattern of the mythical quest is inverted, and the Grail-Knight figure finds the Maimed-King/usurper figure at the end, in a moment that is made to coincide with the frustration of a ritual of regeneration that only two decades later would become inextricable from the literary representation of the Waste Land myth. Both myth and ritual are then represented as futile. The Knight fails to redeem the Maimed King, misapprehending the figure of a degenerated man-god as an ideal and

thus mythically-redemptive Grail, and in his task of killing and succeeding the sick king. As a consequence of both failures, the Waste Land myth is reinterpreted as a story of overt degeneration, the meaning of which is not be found in the inner romance-like structure of the novella, but in the constantly recurrent images of disease, death and decay that permeate the narrative and subvert the Victorian ideal of progress, radically reinterpreting pre-modern myth and thus establishing a continuum of meaning with the overtly mythical and overtly degenerative literature of high modernism.

RESHAPING MYTH

The 'wasteland novels' of American modernism, as it was explored in the third part of this study, arguably constitute the clearest and most explicit process of representation and reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth in the Anglo-American literary tradition, as the pre-modern myth became the most eloquent and functional correlative of the post-war *zeitgeist* in a series of highly influential texts in a very short period of time, a circumstance that not only defined the American canon of the 1920s but that, in fact, determined the prominence (and eventual mythical deconstruction) of the 'waste land imagery' all throughout the twentieth century in American literature, as examined in the fourth part of this dissertation. The prominence of the Waste Land myth in twentieth-century American literature is inextricable from the academic advances in the field of Arthurian studies, as explained in the introduction, regarding the pertinence of myth-ritualism as a school of thought. It is also undeniable that the mythical notion of the Waste Land is rather eloquent to articulate the post-traumatic effects of two world wars, especially in the American context, where the notion of a mythical irreparable Waste Land stands in direct opposition to the mythical conception and representation of America as restored Eden or land of plenty. Yet as far as understanding the pervasiveness of the Waste Land myth in the literature of America in the aftermath of the Great War, it is crucial to take into consideration the influence of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, which explicitly represents the desolation of post-war Europe as counterpart of the Waste Land of Arthurian mythology.

The mythical Waste Land becomes then the most expressive metaphor to characterize the horror-struck, death-ridden post-war world, and hence the myth

vertebrates in Eliot's poem the great complexity of mythical, historical, religious and cultural references that give shape to the text. In this representation, the influence of myth-ritualism cannot be ignored, as it determines the recurrent presence of ritual themes and motifs in Eliot's poem and in the immediately-following tradition. But perhaps more to the point, from a myth-ritualistic standpoint, myths are theorized as inseparable from a mystical meaning that is meant to guarantee the wellbeing of the community. The invalidation of the ritual core of the Waste Land myth as represented in American modernism comes to signify the impossibility of survival and progressively gives shape to a truly apocalyptic reinterpretation of the myth.

Indeed, the First World War resulted in a generalized feeling of distress and hopelessness that denies the possibility of rehabilitation, a phenomenon that is represented in *The Waste Land* in the clear dissonance between the literal and inescapable springtime rebirth of the land and the social circumstances of a world burdened by an overwhelming and irreparable catastrophe. The physical restoration of the Waste Land is morbidly cruel, as it endlessly perpetuates a deathful existence for those condemned to linger there. The cyclical structure of the poem entraps the reader in the ever-recurrent pattern of a myth that has been set out of order and rearranged to convey a new degenerative meaning. The pattern of the hero's quest may be intuited in the poem, but it only functions as the symbolic embodiment of a ritual failure that is all-pervasive in the text. The meaning of resurrection is constantly subverted, in a process of symbolic multi-valence by means of which all referents acquire a polysemic meaning that undermines every moment of apparent regeneration. New life is born out of a land where millions of war victims have been planted and where they rise from their grave, becoming indistinguishable from the ghosts of the war survivors. Such is the new mythical Waste Land, re-signified as eternal and unredeemable. A story of regeneration is then not simply presented as fake, or as only partially successful. Certifying the consolidation of aesthetic modernity, and thus representing mythically the collapse of historical modernity, *The Waste Land* presents the explicit reshaping of a narrative of restoration into a tale of ineluctable degeneration.

Such is also the case of John Dos Passos's 'wasteland novel' *Manhattan Transfer*. The representation of the modern city as a literary, actually symbolist counterpart of the mythical Waste Land in the text, as explained in the eighth chapter of this study, exposes how the enlightened city operates in a similar manner as mythopoetic thought, by attempting to control, govern and set in (political) order the social chaos that defines

the life of the urban community. As represented in Dos Passos's novel, the citizens of Manhattan are fracturing, dissolving and being dehumanized by the cultural institutions that arbitrate city life. They are characterized as inhabitants of the contemporary Waste Land, so that the depiction of the city in fact transcends the limits of metaphorical representation and social critique. The city of Manhattan in Dos Passos's novel operates as a correlative of a corrupt, wasted and spiritually barren civilization that suffers beyond the neurotic discontent of an urban community; as a result, *Manhattan Transfer* also mythologizes the post-war *zeitgeist*, portraying the crystallizing, dehumanizing process by means of which the citizens are trapped into a lifeless existence that emblematizes their aversion for life. The city is thus recreated as a rotting mythical space where not even death can bring along new life, because there is only an imitation of life that futilely attempts to conceal the aridity that defines the characters' existence. But the plight that afflicts this urban Waste Land has no etiology or cure; it is not portrayed as the consequence of an external cause that could perhaps be fixed. The modern city, as a symbol of contemporary existence, is represented as inherently barren and diseased. Such representation, as explained, is carried out by a reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth that is based on the transmutation of conventional symbols of regeneration (flowers, fire, water), which are presented in the novel as signifying an all-encompassing, non-redemptive death. The result is an apocalyptic representation of the traditional tale. The identification of Manhattan with the mythical Waste Land that so often symbolized the disenchanted modernist *zeitgeist* does not recreate the plight of a community in which social and political structures are no longer in harmony with the preternatural cosmology of mythopoeia. On the contrary, the representation of New York City as counterpart of the Waste Land presents the social and institutional life of the modern metropolis as a form of society that petrifies and ultimately annihilates the natural world that is transcendent in mythology. Flowers, fire and water are symbols that juxtapose life and death and thus signify a state of death-in-life that defines the existential condition of those who linger in the Waste Land, an existential condition that results from the social order arbitrated by the institutions that regulate life in the modern city. Thus in *Manhattan Transfer*, the image of the mechanizing, dehumanizing and sickened city, that is, the representation of Manhattan as a mythical Waste Land, symbolizes the philosophical, moral and spiritual collapse of western civilization after the First World War, in a manner that, in fact, recreates the originally regenerative myth as a myth of apocalypse that offers no hope of restoration.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* also represents life in contemporary New York City as identifiable with life in the mythical Waste Land of Arthurian romance, but it extends the analogy to reassess the foundational myths of America—and their fructification in the lifestyle of New York socialites in the 1920s—through the prism of the remade mythopoeia of the wasteland novels. The notion of the American dream as a redeeming communitarian ideal is undermined, as once again a myth of communal regeneration aimed to legitimize a specific form of social order is reshaped to articulate a narrative about the moral and spiritual (and irreversible) disintegration of a community.

The reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth is on point insofar as the foundational mythology of America conceived the country in its origins as a land of plenty, a newly recovered Eden where social prosperity and equality of opportunity are inextricably connected to the overabundant earth fertility. The representation of contemporary America as a Waste Land effectively undermines the legitimizing force of such mythopoeia, a process that is made explicit in Fitzgerald's novel in the inversion of the pioneering journey to the West that reproduces the pattern of the archetypal quest leading through the wilderness into the earthly paradise where individuals and newly-founded communities can thrive. Fitzgerald's characters travel from the corrupt West to the wasted East, which literally displaces the mythical ideal of the frontier pilgrimage. Such wasted East is symbolically emblematized into the ideogram of the valley of ashes, the literal wasteland that in fact signifies the economic unproductiveness, moral degeneration and spiritual barrenness of the materialistic community portrayed in the novel. *The Great Gatsby* thus presents a sort of literal Waste Land governed by a Maimed King, George Wilson, the representative of an effaced working class whose only contribution to the speculative buoyancy of the community is the farming of ashes. Wilson's sexual incapacity mythologizes an economic unproductiveness that, ominous as it is, also stands in as a signifier of a state of spiritual degradation that has become the new meaning of the reshaped Waste Land myth. Once again, the myth, retold, offers no alternative to the degenerative ending. The carelessness of the community, that is, the plight that has laid the land waste, determines that the only character that could escape that collective affliction, Gatsby, is misled into killing Wilson, the character who in mythical terms should have been saved so that the community could be redeemed. The expected resolution of the traditional mythical pattern that underlies the narrative is transformed, but such transformation in fact gives account of the unreality of the social

and individual ideal that Gatsby stands for: the communal belief of the so-called American dream that vertebrates the foundational myths of American and which is subverted in the novel.

Successful pioneering quests are thus replaced with the inevitable failure of Gatsby, pioneer-like character that could never restore the Waste Land because he is himself a product of the Waste Land. Gatsby can only exist in a world of make-believe buoyancy and baseless appearances of splendour. He too is made of ashes. The ideological foundations of the myth are thus reverted, and consequently, so is the credo articulated by the myth. The movement of romance, from Waste Land to newly recovered Eden, is only possible in Nick's romantic imagination. Outside of Nick's romantic perception, the hero of a mythic past, the last 'well' man, is in fact indistinguishable from the rest of the sick community where he is made and where he must perish.

Inescapably, in the modernist reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth there is no hope of regeneration, no chance of retrieving the mystic forces that would ensure redemption from a mythic past that is portrayed as dead and gone. As such, the myth is also represented in Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, the last of the American modernist texts explored in the third part of this study. In Hemingway's novel, the main character's sexual disability functions as a symbolic cornerstone that sustains a network of mythical meanings, which represent the world of the novel as a present-day mythical Waste Land where, once again, there is no hope of restoration. Symbolically, Jake's battle wound functions as an observable symptom of a generalized malady that is represented in a way that recreates (and exposes) the gender-based principles of traditional mythopoeia. As argued, the novel reinterprets the Waste Land myth by representing its ritualistic force as having become a degenerate spectacle of decadence and vanity in the contemporary era, and it does so by disclosing how much the regenerative ending of the Waste Land myth is in fact dependent on a misogynistic restoration of a 'sexual order' that has been unsettled in the modern world. The restoration of this sexual order, represented emblematically through bullfighting, should have ensured the restoration of fecundity and fertility in the Waste Land, yet such gender-based mythopoeia that naturalizes sexual roles is represented in Hemingway's novel as a vain exercise in futility. Brett's individual will frustrates the ritual, and those meant to restore the land to its prosperity—bullfighters, as representatives of masculine vigour—fail in their attempts to restore the naturalized sexual order of traditional

mythology. *The Sun Also Rises* is structured along the pattern of a failed ritual that narrates the story of a Waste Land that cannot be restored, and of a generation that must remain irreparably sick, physically and spiritually.

A myth-critical reading of the text, as carried out in chapter ten of this dissertation, reveals that the novel is far from being simply a realistic portrayal of the hedonistic and self-destructive life-style of the post-war generation. It is in fact a deeply symbolic, mythical narrative that tells the story of a group of characters with no hopes of ever being restored to a wholesome existence, and who must then resign themselves to enduring their diseased lives in the Waste Land. The narrative pattern of the novel—that of a failed ritual—coincides with other structures analyzed in this study, such as it was the case of the history plays, or of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, in which the archetypal quest pattern of romance mythology seems to adopt a circular movement that parallels the eternally-recurrent cycle of natural life. As in all the text mentioned, in Hemingway's novel the circular movement of the characters is portrayed as simultaneous cyclical and destructive, hence giving account of an unbridgeable schism between the eternal but degenerative life in the Waste Land and the eternal but regenerative cycle of the cosmos. The Waste Land remade is eternal and unredeemable. No matter how straightforwardly the representation of the myth and of its mythemes articulates a reflection on the calamitous effects that the First World War had upon western civilization, the myth reinterpreted in modernism always brings up the possibility of communal regeneration only to state that social, moral and spiritual restoration is unattainable once the myth has been rearranged to give account of the new, contemporary social (dis)order.

DECONSTRUCTING MYTH

The fourth part of this study analyzed the texts that inherited the tradition of mythical representation and reinterpretation of the wasteland novels of American modernism, and explored how such interpretative mythopoeia becomes more and more subversive in the path towards American literary postmodernism, carrying out a deconstruction of mythical representation in the broadest sense of the term that reaches its paroxysm in the 1960s. The first text examined in this fourth part is John Steinbeck's overtly myth-

ritualistic *To a God Unknown*, which takes up the pessimistic perspective of the 'wasteland writers' of the 1920s, but which introduces an instance of mythical ambivalence, which is the most crucial characteristic of the process of deconstructive mythical representation as explored in the fourth part of this dissertation. For the first time, the mythical figures of Grail Knight and Fisher King seem to coalesce in one single signifier, which prevents the successful representation of the hero-as-redeemer archetype in a narrative that explicitly depicts the Grail as a talisman of death. The mimetic landscape of the California valley where the story takes place is superimposed with the imagery of the mythical Waste Land as reinterpreted in modernism; images of apparent fecundity and fertility are juxtaposed to an overwhelming presence of death that seems to wait at every turn of events and permeates every space in the novel. The Grail, the mythical source of redemption and regeneration, is reinterpreted as a source of death and desolation.

Revealing the influence of modernist mythopoeia, the transformation of the Waste Land myth into a traditional tale of degeneration is irrevocable. In fact, it is exacerbated. The wasting of the old East has extended to affect the western, plentiful California, and now America as a hole is explicitly depicted as a dying land. The mythical pattern of the novel fuses the mythical signifieds of Maimed King and Grail Knight, and in doing so it explicitly effaces the barrier that used to separate the sick and the well. Myth is once again presented as an alternative of order for a convulsive social climate, but after the prominence of myth in the literature of post-war modernism, it is evident in the after-modernist texts that myth is an adaptable narrative, the meaning of which can in fact change in the process of literary representation. This is the first step in an understanding of myth that deconstructs it as a master narrative to utilize it explicitly as an adaptive narrative, for as it has been argued throughout this study, the literary uses of mythology expose that myths are necessarily malleable and constantly changing, as they attempt to naturalize, explain, or organize diverse social realities that are in constant evolution.

Steinbeck's novel recreates the myth of the Waste Land in a myth-ritualistic narrative where the figures of the Fisher King and the Grail Knight are not easily differentiated, and it represents the Grail as a talisman of death. Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*, the after-modernist novel explored in chapter twelve, presents a remade myth in which the characters of Fisher King and Grail Knight are straightforward undistinguishable, because they have completely fused together, in a world where redemption can only be found in the wilful renunciation of ever finding and knowing

the Grail and its meaning, a compulsion that the characters in the novel cannot suppress. As an evident heir of the 'wasteland novels' of the 1920s, *Nightwood* reinterprets the Waste Land myth as a tale of degeneration that in fact subverts the *morbidification* of contemporary life carried out by degeneration theory, which was fundamental for the degenerative reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth in American modernism. But in Barnes's novel, the symbolic ambivalence that represented all forms of new life in the Waste Land as inherently sick and rotten in the texts of modernism has transformed into a form of mythical ambivalence by means of which the character of the Doctor is portrayed as a healer and as a Fisher-King figure in need of restoration, sick with a universal malady that has infected every character in the novel, including Nora, the Grail Knight who asks the transcendental question to the Fisher King while simultaneously seeking spiritual and psychological relief for herself. One by one, the different mythemes that make up the recreated Waste Land myth become more and more undifferentiated, their meaning more and more ambiguous. The result is the invalidation of the up until then (apparently) unbreakable dichotomies that articulate mythopoetic thought.

As argued throughout this study, myth functions primarily as rhetoric device that aims to capture, simplify and explain the complexities of the world, constituting thus a discursive representation from which human communities can obtain social, moral and often transcendental certainties that allow them to apprehend the chaos of reality in a non-destructive way. Mythopoeia is thus a symbolic endeavour, and as such it is built upon a set of hierarchical conceptual oppositions and functions as an ideological weapon, attempts to legitimize a specific social and political system and the ways in which that system distributes power. In *Nightwood*, myth is thus dismantled with no intentions of ever being reconstructed again, aiming to instead represent a pre-symbolic, that is, pre-mythic and gender-free reality, no matter how chaotic. In the Anglo-American tradition as explored in this study, the mythical signified had always pre-existed the symbolic signifier. In *Nightwood*, such hierarchical dichotomy is subverted. The signifier is revealed as pre-existing (and thus creating) the signified. Nora and the Doctor can both be identified with the Fisher King and the Grail Knight of mythology at different moments in the story. Mythical meaning is exposed as created *through* representation and thus as contingent and not as a revelation of transcendental certainty.

Mythical meaning in literature is construed through the interplay of a traditional, pre-modern archetypal story and its potentially infinite literary representations. In

Nightwood, there is no wish or nostalgia for the recovery of the social order construed by traditional mythopoetic thought. Degeneration—which is in truth the universal malady that plights the Interwar Waste Land—is no longer understood as a deviance from a wholesome genus that must be or should be restored. The desire for the rehabilitation of a masculine reproductive sexuality that the myth established as the source of all life is overcome and replaced by a rejection of such vigorous masculinity as a source of regeneration. The principles of the myth are destabilized and in consequence the text challenges the belief that such principles could actually recreate a true natural cosmos. In effect, the naturalized social order construed symbolically in pre-modern myth is thus laid waste in the modern world. Such is the new Waste Land, as represented in literature after modernism: a land without mythology, or rather, a land with no faith in mythology.

In the other texts explored in the fourth part of this study, this (new kind of) mythical Waste Land is often represented through very complex processes of mythical representation that defy the notion that it is possible to represent one single and unified meaning. After modernism, the Grail Knight reaches the Fisher King's castle, finds the Grail and asks the question; eventually, he acquires the King's true knowledge of life and inherits his role. The quest is completed and so is the ritual, but such fulfilment is useless for the mythical restoration of the present-day Waste Land because, in the basis of a multivalent mythical representation, mythical roles (and meanings) have become undistinguishable, and the actions meant to bring about regeneration are reconfigured as ineluctably destructive.

In the case of Bernard Malamud's *The Natural*, the pattern of the Waste Land myth is rather evident in the novel, yet it is superimposed upon a different kind of mythical narrative: a story of baseball folklore that multiplies the mythical references and outlines a historical perspective of America in 1950s that is widely comprehensive and very pessimistic. The concept of a unified national identity—configured through baseball folklore—is thus subverted through a process of mythical ambiguity where heroes and villains of baseball mythology coalesce with opposing Arthurian mythemes in a complicated system of representation that conveys the uncertainties of the social and political context in which the text generates. Establishing a continuum of meaning with *The Great Gatsby*, *The Natural* represents the materialistically prosperous 1950s as the moral and spiritual Waste Land that in fact resulted from World War II. Of course, this mythical reinterpretation continues and exacerbates the imagery and the core

ideology of modernist mythopoeia, and thus represents American society in the 1950s as irreparably desolate, despite the economic prosperity of consumer capitalism that attempted to masquerade the horror hiding at the root of such buoyancy: the violence, destruction and dehumanization of war, the political repression of the times, and the social inequalities of the far-from-idyllic consumption era. *The Natural* portrays this apparently prosperous but truly rotting society by presenting a more or less explicit (yet significantly divergent) Grail narrative that multiplies contradictory references. It fuses Eden and Waste Land in one single signifier—that also stands in as deleterious Grail-figure—so that both extremes of romance mythology become the same ambivalent space, from which there is no outside or alternative. Wonderland and Waste Land are no longer understood or construed as opposing concepts; the hierarchical binary opposition that used to vertebrate the myth in traditional romance has been deconstructed.

The result of such mythical deconstruction is the complete refutation of the ideology that underlies the pre-modern version of the myth, a circumstance that is evident in the postmodernist texts analyzed in the last two chapters of this study. As detailed in chapter fourteen, the irreversible degeneration of the Promised Land of America (and of mythology) into the Waste Land of contemporary existence replaced the foundational ideal of the United States as a land of plenty in the American literary canon as recurrent theme and governing metaphor. It is a trend certainly consolidated in the 1960s, as demonstrated, for instance, by Bellow's denunciation in his novel *Herzog* (1964) of what he defined as "the commonplaces of the Wasteland outlook" (81). This "full crisis of dissolution" (80) that Kermode designated with the term "wastelandism" (*Ending* 113) is the tradition taken up by Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, a novel traditionally assessed as an archetypal romance in the manner of contemporary American western. Such critical interpretation was reappraised in this study, taking into consideration the fact that after-modernist and postmodernist reinterpretations of the Waste Land myth—which constitutes the mythical substratum of Kesey's novel—allow for contesting the truth value of the original myth. In effect, Kesey's postmodern novel undercuts the modern master narrative of mythology that asserts the validity of pre-modern myth as a source of order and true meaning for the chaos and anarchy of human existence. As in other texts analyzed in the fourth part of this study, in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, the alleged hero of romance in fact embodies a multiplicity of changeable mythical references, which results in a reconfiguration of the mythical ideal he supposedly stands for, and which proves false

the claim that the pre-modern myth conveys a universal and absolutely true meaning that can be transferred into the modern world in order to make sense of it. Because the meaning of the myth as represented in Kesey's novel is rather explicitly the meaning that results *after* the rearranging of the signifiers. The story of the characters constructs the meaning; the meaning does not pre-exist the narrative, and thus it is reasonable to challenge the argument that Kesey's text draws its significance from the masculinist mythopoeia that it is built on.

The novel relates a return to nature and a set of extremely violent actions but, rather than legitimizing such violence by narrating a story of regeneration through violence, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* exposes the rhetoric trap of a mythopoeia that naturalizes sexual violence through a story of masculinist supremacy. For the mystique of male sexual vigour as a life force in Kesey's text only results in a perpetuation of futile aggression and endless violence. The liberation of the men's repressed sexuality only aggravates their sickness. The myth is functional in the novel; it is represented in a rather straightforward way: the Grail-Knight figure completes his journey and restores the Fisher King's health. But the rearranging of the signifiers deconstructs the ideology. The healing of the Fisher King no longer brings about the restoration of a social climate of dehumanization and cultural standardization where life-repressive forms of social control annihilate the individual's will to live. The mystical connection between the Fisher King and the Waste Land no longer holds the transcendent meaning of the myth, and there is no Grail to be found. The myth is represented quite literally and explicitly, but regeneration—the ideological and mystical justification of the pre-modern tale—is simply not part of the story anymore.

As a myth-critical exploration of Pynchon's novels *V.* and *The Crying of Lot 49* has demonstrated, in the new Waste Land without (true) myth, it is the horror and anarchy of the contemporary world that is responsible for the creation of new versions of the pre-modern myth that narrate, in this case, a unholy quest in search of lifelessness and annihilation. In *V.*, the linear pattern of the quest is replaced by a plunging, V-shaped journey that leads to complete disappearance. Stencil pursues his dream of annihilation, that is, his extra-conscious acquisition of the meaning of V., only to find out that there can be no redemption in a world where all life, literally, has become lifeless. The Waste Land has become now the Inanimate Land, where life is no longer burdened by frustration, sickness or death, because there is no life at all, only the robotic appearance of life. Sexuality is not frustrated, barren, sickening or violent. It has

become an annihilating form of procreation that replaces living organisms with prosthetics. The literary symbolization of the Arthurian myth explored throughout this study thus comes full circle. From literally killing the king in a ritual of sacrifice, to dramatically representing that ritual; from staging the primitive ritual to composing a romance; from reciting the courtly romance to fabricating a metaphor for modernity—such is, in the basis of myth-ritualism, the evolution of the Waste Land myth, from its ritualistic origins to its literary use in historical modernity. In the age of cultural modernity, however, what this study has examined is the progressive disintegration of such metaphor for the modern world and the continued subversion of the mythical meaning supposedly contained in it.

In the last chapter of the present study, what may thus be observed is a return to a pre-symbolic representation of the myth that exploits the literalism of the ritual structure and narrative pattern of the myth, to turn around its alleged true meaning. It is evident as the symbolization of the Waste Land myth, in the story of a particular character in *V.*, suddenly takes the form of a literal sacrificial rite. Yet instead of presenting the killing of the divine king, a young woman is sacrificed under the influence of V., that is, of the Grail, which is in turn represented as bringing about a mechanizing, annihilation of life. The ritualistic and transcendent meaning of the myth is exposed explicitly, but such ritual force no longer seeks the restoration of life, but the ultimate destruction of any remaining forms of life in the new Waste Land of prosthetics and engineering. A similar occurrence is narrated in *The Crying of Lot 49*, as it was explained: the human bones of war victims are harvested and commercialized as fertilizer. This constitutes a perverse and yet literal narrative of fertilization, which is, however, only one symbolic manifestation among many of an age-old conspiracy, or of an ever-recurrent archetypal narrative.

After aesthetic modernity, the beliefs beneath the myth can be changed at will, and thus myth functions at last as nothing but a transitory fiction, in which the mythical signifieds that articulate a mystical tale of restoration—in the case of the Waste Land myth—have been replaced by a multiplicity of surfaces that in fact now contain the (changeable and transient) meaning. Of course, once the community no longer believes in the transcendence of mythology, myth loses its purpose as an instrument of social cohesion, and becomes merely a form of self-expression that holds no absolute meaning. The Eden/Waste Land antinomy that had articulated so many literary representations of the Waste Land myth, as explored in this study, is then revealed as an

ideologeme, an ideological construct that projects a system of values for a community, but that is in fact socially and historically determined.

Such is myth, as it has been considered throughout this research project about the literary uses of pre-modern mythology: its function in origin is only social and ideological, never cosmogonist. The processes of mythical representation in literature reveal precisely that immanence of myth. The functionality of mythopoeia as a narrative that structures plot and constructs literary meanings is contingent and ideologically conditioned. And, even though such mythopoeia has been institutionalized through repetition along tradition, it is in fact recurrently reinterpreted and subverted in the literature that resists the dominant cultural discourses.

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APPENDIX

RESUMEN EN ESPAÑOL

OBJETIVOS DE ESTA INVESTIGACIÓN

El objetivo general de este proyecto de investigación es explorar, a partir de una interpretación mito-crítica de un corpus de obras seleccionadas, el proceso de representación y reinterpretación del mito de la Tierra Baldía en diferentes etapas de la tradición literaria en lengua inglesa. Con ello, este trabajo busca analizar críticamente las repercusiones ideológicas que tiene la utilización de los relatos míticos en la práctica literaria. Así, esta tesis doctoral pretende corroborar la hipótesis de que, en efecto, los mitos articulan ideologías de poder dominantes, las cuales operan como garantes del orden político-social de una determinada comunidad. Frente a esto, la *representación literaria* del mito puede analizarse, como este estudio busca demostrar, como una representación subversiva (o subvertida, al menos) de aquél, lo cual no puede sino resultar en la formación de narraciones que funcionen como contra-discursos, esto es, como discursos que desafíen y se opongan a los discursos dominantes en torno al orden social y a la estabilidad política que se legitiman precisamente a través de la mitología.

Este proceso de contestación ideológica, llevado a cabo según se pretende exponer, a través de los procesos de representación y reinterpretación mítica que se desarrollan en los textos literarios, se examina en este estudio de manera específica mediante la lectura mito-crítica de un selecto corpus de textos. Estos textos se generan en cuatro etapas bien diferenciadas de la tradición literaria en lengua inglesa, lo cual justifica la división del trabajo de investigación en cuatro partes: la primera se ocupa de analizar el teatro político inglés del Renacimiento; la segunda pretende elucidar los

procesos de representación mítica que pueden rastrearse en los romances británicos del siglo XIX; la tercera explora la mito-poética modernista en la literatura de los Estados Unidos, y la cuarta, por fin, examina los textos literarios contemporáneos que heredan esta mito-poética del modernismo estadounidense —según puede argüirse, el momento de la tradición literaria en lengua inglesa en el cual el mito artúrico de la Tierra Baldía adquiere mayor prominencia y mayor complejidad de significado, como este estudio busca demostrar.

Así, el objetivo aquí reseñado de este proyecto de investigación justifica la elección de los textos, autores, y etapas de la tradición literaria anglo-americana de los cuales se ocupa esta tesis. En las cuatro partes de las que consta este trabajo se analiza la relevancia y la funcionalidad del género del romance en términos generales, y del mito de la Tierra Baldía en particular, observados ambos fenómenos en manifestaciones literarias muy diversas en términos históricos y estéticos. Sin embargo, esta tesis doctoral tiene como objetivo establecer una continuidad de significado que se extienda desde el teatro histórico de Christopher Marlowe hasta las novelas experimentales de Thomas Pynchon. Para ello, este trabajo busca trazar un patrón significativo que de coherencia a un corpus tan amplio y tan diverso. Según se pretende demostrar, este patrón puede de hecho hallarse a través de la indagación de representaciones *degenerativas* del mito de la Tierra Baldía, las cuales exponen la naturaleza de mito —en origen, un mito de *regeneración*— como estrategia de dominación política y control social. Con ello se refuerza el primer objetivo de investigación reseñado, y fin último de este trabajo: la exposición de los mecanismos representativos que hacen del pensamiento mito-poético un arma política, por así decirlo, empleada por las clases dominantes con el objetivo de perpetuar unas determinadas estructuras sociales que, a través de la mitología, se *naturalizan* para erigirse en realidades preternaturales inamovibles y necesarias.

El objetivo de esta tesis doctoral no es analizar distintos enfoques mito-críticos y seleccionar uno de entre los muchos posibles como el instrumento metodológico óptimo para conocer cuál es el verdadero significado de la mitología. Por el contrario, este estudio pretende incorporar muchos de los argumentos más elocuentes que se han propuesto por muchos y muy diversos críticos del mito, quienes a lo largo de las décadas han formulado distintas hipótesis sobre los propósitos y el funcionamiento de la mito-poética en general, y de la mitología artúrica en particular. En todos los casos, no obstante, tales argumentos críticos y teóricos se aplican al comentario crítico de los

textos propuestos a lo largo de este estudio, el cual, como se ha mencionado, persigue el objetivo de avanzar una hipótesis crítica acerca de la inmanencia del significado mítico en su representación literaria, esto es, del significado mítico socialmente construido e ideológicamente condicionado que, de manera inevitable, se reinterpreta mediante el proceso de representación y recreación literaria.

EL MITO DE LA TIERRA BALDÍA

El mito de la Tierra Baldía aparece por primera vez en el romance francés medieval *Perceval o el Cuento del Grial* de Chrétien de Troyes, compuesto, parece, a finales del siglo XII, en torno al año 1180. En dicho romance, el joven caballero Perceval visita el castillo del Rey Pescador, un rey herido en los muslos cuya impotencia sexual trae consigo la infertilidad de su reino. Para poder llevar a cabo un estudio del mito en profundidad, es preciso entender que la narración de Chrétien reproduce simbólicamente el funcionamiento de la monarquía, esto es, la principal institución política medieval, por cuanto la citada narración da cuenta de una relación mística inextricable entre la salud del monarca y la prosperidad del reino. Para muchos autores, no obstante, el mito artúrico constituye la primera reinterpretación de una forma mítica aún más antigua, cuyo origen debe situarse en la tradición mitológica celta. Desde esta perspectiva, antiguos mitos irlandeses habrían influido y dado forma a los relatos legendarios galeses y bretones, en los cuales pueden rastrearse los prototipos de los diversos elementos constitutivos del mito artúrico (Loomis 18). Estos relatos legendarios presentan similitudes evidentes con los romances artúricos, las cuales, según se ha argumentado, obedece a la circunstancia histórica de los *conteurs* franceses de los siglos XII y XIII descendían de los bretones que a Armórica en los siglos V y VI (Loomis 13-14).

Así, que establecida una relación de continuidad entre la antigua mitología celta, los mitos galeses, los relatos míticos bretones y los romances franceses medievales, que sitúa el origen primero de estos últimos en los relatos míticos irlandeses *echtrai*. En estos, un héroe mortal visita una palacio sobrenatural, donde contempla acontecimientos extraordinarios y comprueba, al despertar a la mañana siguiente, que tanto el castillo como el anfitrión han desaparecido (Loomis 47). Coinciden así estos relatos con la trama de *Perceval*. El joven caballero, en su viaje de vuelta a casa, se encuentra con un río que

no puede cruzar, cuando un hombre que pesca en una barca le ofrece cobijo en su casa durante la noche. En ese momento, en mitad de un paisaje completamente desértico, aparece la torre de un castillo. Perceval es recibido entre sus muros, donde el joven caballero se convierte en testigo de extraños acontecimientos:

> Y mientras hablaban de diversas cosas, de una cámara llegó un paje que llevaba una lanza blanca empuñada por la mitad, y pasó entre el fuego y los que estaban sentados en el lecho. Todos los que estaban ahí veían la lanza blanca y el hierro blanco, y una gota de sangre salía del extremo de hierro de la lanza, y hasta la mano del paje manaba la gota bermeja (…) Mientras tanto llegaron otros dos pajes que llevaban en la mano candelabros de oro fino trabajado con nieles. Los pajes que llevaban los candelabros eran muy hermosos. En cada candelabro ardían lo menos diez candelas. Una doncella, hermosa, gentil y bien ataviada, que venía con los pajes, sostenía entre sus dos manos un grial. Cuando allí hubo entrado con el grial que llevaba, se hizo una luz tan grande, que las candelas perdieron su brillo, como les ocurre a las estrellas cuando sale el sol, o la luna (…) a cada alimento que se les servía, ve pasar una vez más delante de él el grial completamente descubierto, y no sabe a quién se sirve con él, aunque deseaba saberlo. (Troyes 95-8)

A la mañana siguiente, en consonancia con el prototipo irlandés descrito por Loomis, Perceval comprueba atónito que no queda nadie en el castillo. El protagonista parte con intención de continuar su viaje, cuando, de repente, se encuentra con una doncella “que llora, grita y se desespera como infeliz desdichada” (101). La doncella adivina que Perceval ha pasado la noche en el castillo del Rey Pescador:

> —Gentil señor, es rey, os lo puedo asegurar; pero en una batalla fue herido y tullido sin remedio, de suerte que ya no se puede valer, pues fue alcanzado por un venablo entre los dos muslos, y ello aún le angustia tanto que no puede montar a caballo. Pero cuando quiere distraerse o tomarse algún solaz, se hace meter en una barca y va pescando con el anzuelo; por esto se llama el Rey Pescador. Y por esta razón se distrae así, pues no podría soportar ni tolerar ninguna otra distracción. (Troyes 102-3)

Según el relato de la doncella, el Rey Pescador es un rey tullido, cuya herida genital trae consigo la desolación del reino. Con sólo haber preguntado qué eran la lanza y el grial que Perceval vio pasar durante la cena "hubiera[ ] reparado tanto, que el buen rey, que está tullido, hubiera recuperado el dominio de sus miembros y la posesión de su tierra" (Troyes 104). Quedan así formulados los principios fundamentales del mito de la Tierra Baldía. Dicho mito, es verdad, sufrirá sucesivas transformaciones a lo largo de la Edad Media, si bien el elemento significativo fundamental que lo sostiene —la conexión mística entre el rey y su reino— permanecerá invariable en todas las versiones.

Específicamente, el prototipo mítico del mitema de la Tierra Baldía, Loomis lo halla en un *echtra* en particular: *The Adventure of Art Son of Conn*. Este *echara* cuenta la historia del Rey Conn de Tara, cuyo matrimonio con la malvada Becuma trae consigo la transformación de su reino en un yermo sin leche ni maíz. Para restaurar la prosperidad del reino, el Rey Conn emprende un viaje que lo conduce a un palacio sobrenatural en una isla misteriosa, donde el rey contempla la magia de un cuerno de la abundancia. Paralelamente, Loomis señala un relato mítico galés: la Tercera Rama del Mabinogi, *Manawydan*. Ésta es la historia de un rey desheredado y de su viaje al reino de Dyfed, para casarse con Rhiannon y convertirse rey del territorio. Allí, tras un breve periodo de paz y felicidad, tiene lugar un infortunio: Manawydan se sienta en un montículo mágico e, inmediatamente, el reino se convierte en un desierto desolado, sin poblados, ni gentes, ni animales.

Según Loomis argumenta, estos 'prototipos' de la Tierra Baldía que pueden rastrearse en la mitología irlandesa y en los relatos legendarios galeses, da cuenta de un proceso de euhemerización mediante el cual los dioses paganos de la mitología celta pasaron a ser sustituidos por reyes 'divinos' (Loomis 24). Los dioses que habitan palacios sobrenaturales en los mitos irlandeses se transforman, en los romances artúricos, en reyes cuya divinidad se manifiesta a través de un vínculo espiritual con la tierra. Dicho vínculo motiva que la prosperidad del reino dependa, en última instancia, tanto de la fortaleza como de la salud del rey. De este modo, los mitos artúricos dan cuenta de una concepción mítica de la monarquía que resulta fundamental para comprender las distintas representaciones medievales del mito de la Tierra Baldía.

Del mismo modo en que los dioses mitológicos irlandeses son sustituidos por reyes divinos en la tradición artúrica, el grial pasa de ser un talismán mágico que alimenta y da luz, a convertirse en el Santo Cáliz, una reliquia sagrada de la pasión de Jesucristo. La transformación se produce en la obra *Joseph d'Arimathie*, elaborada por un caballero

francés, Robert de Boron, poco después de la composición de los romances de Chrétien. Significativamente, la obra de de Boron reitera el patrón que vincula la castración de un rey con la esterilidad de la tierra, por lo que puede observarse que, en los romances medievales, una vez iniciada la cristianización del Grial —que pasa a ser el Santo Cáliz de la Última Cena— la relevancia de la Tierra Baldía y del Rey Tullido dentro del canon artúrico permanece inalterada. Así ocurre, de igual modo, en la única fuente en lengua inglesa de las leyendas artúricas, esto es, *Le Morte D'Arhtur*, de Thomas Malory, una serie de romances editados en 1485 por William Caxton y recopilados en un único libro. En dichos romances puede constatarse como, ya a finales del siglo XV, el antiguo mito pagano —asociado para gran parte de la crítica con ritos primitivos de fertilidad— se ha transformado por completo en un episodio concreto de la historia de una reliquia religiosa.

La cristianización definitiva de la historia del Grial se lleva a cabo en dos volúmenes de *La Vulgata*: la *Estoire del Saint Grial* y la *Queste del Saint Graal*, ambos posteriores a la obra de Robert de Boron, y pertenecientes a una serie de cinco volúmenes escritos en prosa, en torno al siglo XIII en Francia, que recogen el canon artúrico completo. Estos dos volúmenes sirven de inspiración al romance de Malory, la "Demanda del Santo Grial." Este romance narra la historia de unos caballeros de la corte del Rey Arturo en Camelot, quienes deben encontrar la santa reliquia para sanar al Rey Tullido y restaurar así la prosperidad del reino gobernado por aquél. En los romances de Malory, el Rey Pelles, como el Rey Pescador de Chrétien, padece una herida entre los muslos; sin embargo, no fue herido en una batalla, sino tratando de hacerse con una misteriosa espada. Éste es sólo uno de los distintos 'reyes tullidos' que aparecen en los romances de Malory, no obstante. El padre de Pelles, el Rey Pellam, fue herido en una batalla como el Rey Pescador de Chrétien, cuando el caballero Balin lo hiere con una lanza mágica. Se trata de la misma lanza que el soldado romano Longino le clavó en el costado a Jesucristo después de la crucifixión. Más allá de la proliferación de reliquias religiosas en el relato, la relevancia de este episodio en Malory, no obstante, reside en que una vez más reproduce el mito de la Tierra Baldía. Balin, al escapar del castillo de Pellam, comprueba que por herir al Rey ha causado la desolación de tres reinos. Curiosamente, el Rey Pellam a su vez es hijo del Rey Labor, cuya muerte en la batalla trajo consigo una terrible plaga que también desoló el reino, dejando los ríos sin peces y los campos sin maíz, por lo que los hombres convinieron en llamar a este reino desolado la Tierra Baldía.

En suma, entre el siglo XII y el siglo XV, pueden rastrearse diversas representaciones del mito artúrico de la Tierra Baldía, el cual se incorpora a la literatura en lengua inglesa a través de los ya mencionados romances de Thomas Malory. Para el propósito de este estudio, cabe destacar, por una parte, la pervivencia, a lo largo de los siglos, de determinados elementos constitutivos del mito, a saber: el rey herido y la impotencia sexual; la conexión entre la emasculación del rey y un reino desolado, bien por una plaga, bien por un encantamiento; la estructura narrativa de la búsqueda; el poder místico del grial, y la tarea heroica de un joven caballero, que siente como propio el deber de encontrar el grial para poder sanar al rey y restaurar así tanto el bienestar del reino como la fertilidad de la tierra. Con todo, desde la perspectiva de este estudio, también resulta necesario prestar atención a las sucesivas reinterpretaciones del mito que se suceden con el paso del tiempo, a saber: en una primera fase, el proceso de euhemerización descrito por Loomis, y, en la Edad Media, la cristianización de la historia del grial. A través de los siglos, puede observarse cómo el mito de la Tierra Baldía articula así diferentes significados simbólicos, históricos y sociales en función de las estructuras comunitarias y de los estados de conciencia, los cuales generan las múltiples reinterpretaciones del mito. La dialéctica entre pervivencia y reinterpretación de los elementos constitutivos del mito de la Tierra Baldía es fundamental para comprender y explorar las distintas representaciones literarias del mito que ocurren en diversas etapas de la Modernidad y de la Post-Modernidad. Debe tenerse en cuenta, pues, que el mito de la Tierra Baldía ha funcionado a lo largo de la historia como correlato simbólico de un contexto histórico que, precisamente, se ha articulado en los textos mediante la representación y la reinterpretación de patrones míticos.

ALGUNAS CONSIDERACIONES TEÓRICAS

De entre todas las escuelas de pensamiento que se han ocupado del estudio de los mitos artúricos, la más relevante para los objetivos de este estudio de investigación es la escuela mito-ritualista. Esta escuela, que también recibe el nombre de ‘Ritualistas de Cambridge’, estuvo conformada por un grupo de estudiosos clasicistas que, en la década anterior a la Primera Guerra Mundial, emplearon sus esfuerzos críticos a la aplicación de la teoría del mito y del rito de James G. Frazer al estudio de los mitos clásicos y del

teatro clásico más temprano (Segal *Theorizing* 49). Algunos años más tarde, una autora contemporánea de estos 'Ritualistas', Jessie Weston, aplicó la teoría del 'mito-rito' al estudio de las leyendas de grial en la obra clave *From Ritual to Romance* (1920), la cual, como es bien sabido, ejerció una poderosa influencia sobre la representación del mito de la Tierra Baldía llevada a cabo por T.S. Eliot en *The Waste Land* (1922) —lo que por cierto determinó el curso de la representación de este mito a lo largo de todo el siglo XX. Precisamente por ello, las interpretaciones (y las reinterpretaciones) mito-ritualistas del mito de la Tierra Baldía se exploran en detalle a lo largo de este estudio, partiendo siempre de la noción clave de que, desde una perspectiva crítica mito-ritualista, se entiende de que la literatura se remonta en origen a los mitos, que a su vez constituyen las muchas variantes del 'guión' original de un rito primordial: el sacrificio del rey tribal, cuya muerte y sucesión por parte de un joven heredero aseguraba la fertilidad de la tierra (Segal *Theorizing* 44).

Esta perspectiva mito-ritualista que conecta el mito de la Tierra Baldía con ritos ancestrales de fertilidad es ciertamente la principal escuela mito-crítica que ha estudiado este mito en cuestión a lo largo del siglo XX. No obstante, se hace necesario tomar en cuenta también el trabajo de estudiosos artúricos como Roger S. Loomis and John Carey, cuya labor se ha centrado en tratar de situar los orígenes del mito artúrico en la mitología irlandesa, aplicando una metodología comparativa al estudio de las leyendas artúrica y galesa. Como ya se ha reseñado brevemente en este resumen, la visión crítica de estos autores es crucial para presentar el mito de la Tierra Baldía de una manera completa y coherente; sin embargo, el acercamiento mito-ritualista es sin duda la metodológica crítica que resulta más funcional para el desarrollo global de este trabajo de investigación, por diversos motivos.

En primer lugar, es imprescindible tomar en consideración la influencia corroborada que tuvo la publicación de *From Ritual to Romance* en las representaciones literarias del mito de la Tierra Baldía a lo largo del siglo XX. Esta influencia (literaria) no tiene parangón en el conjunto de estudios críticos de los romances del Grial hasta y desde entonces. Se trata a todas luces de una influencia decisiva a la hora de determinar cómo es posible una reinterpretación mítica tan transgresora coma la que se lleva a cabo a lo largo del siglo XX en la literatura en lengua inglesa, específicamente en la literatura de los Estados Unidos. Este fenómeno, según puede argüirse, obedece a dos causas principales. Primero, debe reconocerse que el libro de Weston constituye una revolución crítica en el ámbito de los estudios artúricos. Por primera vez, la historia del Grial se

separa críticamente del pensamiento cristiano, que había sido la perspectiva crítica dominante desde la Edad Media. Weston formula la hipótesis de que el mito de la Tierra Baldía no es sino la evolución narrativa de un antiguo rito pagano de fertilidad. La hipótesis se origina (como todas las hipótesis mito-ritualistas) en *The Golden Bough*, el tratado de antropología de James G. Frazer, de extraordinaria influencia. Esta obra, como es bien sabido, es un estudio del mito y de la religión que avanzó la hipótesis de que todos los mitos surgen como transposición narrativa (bien como explicación, o como registro) de ceremonias rituales, entre las cuales destaca una sobre todas las demás: el rito de sacrificio del rey tribal, en cuyo cuerpo, según una creencia ancestral, vive alojado el dios de la vegetación, y que por tanto debe ser sacrificado cuando se debilita o cae enfermo. Este rito, inextricable del ciclo estacional, tiene como fin mágico la restauración de la vegetación en primavera, pues estas culturas primigenias, según la hipótesis de Frazer, creían que la fertilidad de la tierra dependía directamente de la fortaleza y el vigor del rey. Así, Weston arguye que el mito de la Tierra Baldía debe provenir de tal creencia, lo que en el año 1920 en efecto desvincula el mito del Grial de la tradición cristiana en la que había estado ubicado durante siglos. El proceso de 'reinterpretación' del mito acontecido en la Edad Media, la cristianización explícita del mitema del Grial, parece revertirse: un mito codificado como cristiano a lo largo de la tradición se recodifica a principios del siglo XX como mito pagano, una circunstancia que evidentemente cristaliza en la representación literaria del mito que sigue a esta 'revolución' crítica—de manera más visible, claro, en *The Waste Land*, de T.S. Eliot, y en las obras directamente influidas por este poema.

El segundo motivo por el cual la influencia del libro de Weston es innegable en la literatura subsiguiente —y, por tanto, determinante para este estudio— es la multiplicación de los referentes míticos que origina la aseveración de que, de hecho, el origen del mito artúrico en cuestión debe hallarse en un rito sacrificial primigenio. Así es como de hecho se manifiesta la perspectiva crítica mito-ritualista en su transposición a la literatura. Pues si se suscribe la hipótesis de que la muerte sacrificial del rey tribal constituye el origen del mito de la Tierra Baldía, tal sacrificio, junto con los muchos elementos simbólicos y temáticos que apelan a la magia ritual, se convierten de manera inmediata en referentes textuales que representan el mito mismo. Así, significantes rituales como ritos y deidades de la vegetación, cartas del Tarot, o corridas de toros pueden interpretarse como la representación literaria del mito de la Tierra Baldía en los distintos textos que recogen esta tradición. Adoptando una metodología crítica mito-

ritualista, no puede sino aceptarse el sustrato ritual del romance como modo literario; en consecuencia, los componentes y las referencias rituales de un texto no pueden sino ser considerados como los constituyentes *ab origine* del mito artúrico representado y reinterpretado en los textos literarios.

Un tercer motivo por el cual este estudio, en su mayor parte, se encuadra en el marco teórico del mito-ritualismo, se halla en el hecho de que la interpretación ritualista del mito claramente enfatiza la función social y comunitaria de éste. Desde la perspectiva crítica mito-ritualista de Frazer y Weston, el mito adquiere una dimensión mágica evidente, la cual establece que el significado teleológico del relato mítico, por cuanto éste se desarrollar a partir de una estructura ritual ancestral, no es otro que garantizar la supervivencia de la comunidad, ya que ésa es la finalidad de la magia tribal. Teniendo esto en consideración, no es absurdo entonces argumentar que, de hecho, el mito medieval narra una historia de restauración comunitaria, legitimando así la ideología que garantiza la perpetuación del statu quo, y supuestamente, del bien común. No obstante, como se detalla cuidadosamente a lo largo de este estudio, el mito, una vez representado y reinterpretado de manera subversiva en la literatura, de hecho viene a certificar la imposibilidad de tal regeneración comunitaria, revelando así que la teleología mítica no es sino un constructo ideológico impuesto por las clases dominantes y autorizadas.

La última razón que determina la prominencia del mito-ritualismo como escuela crítica a lo largo de este trabajo tiene que ver con el hecho de que, en la tradición de los estudios artúricos, sólo la interpretación mito-ritualista del mito de la Tierra Baldía ha situado el foco crítico sobre la propia Tierra Baldía, entendiendo que este mitema contiene en sí mismo el significado fundamental del relato. Esta circunstancia explica, en primer lugar, la denominación elegida de ‘mito de la Tierra Baldía’— frente a otras posibles como ‘mito del Grial’, o ‘mito del Rey Pescador’— empleada a lo largo de este estudio, y a la vez, permite una elucidación más clara sobre cuál es la relevancia del mito de la Tierra Baldía en la tradición literaria anglo-americana, la cual a su vez permite una comprensión más en profundidad acerca del funcionamiento ideológico del propio mito. Esto es así porque de hecho, a lo largo de la tradición estudiada, las representaciones literarias del mito de la Tierra Baldía han enfatizado repetidamente la desolación de este reino mítico por encima de otros componentes del relato, para así transmitir una serie de preocupaciones sociales, políticas e ideológicas que se han beneficiado en gran medida de la simbolización mito-ritualista del mito. Esta

perspectiva crítica, como se ha explicado, conecta la prosperidad de la tierra (y, por metonimia, de la comunidad) con la vitalidad y la fuerza del rey, conectando así la necesidad de un orden político jerárquico con fuerzas preternaturales y cosmológicas. Esta supuesta correspondencia entre la esfera natural y la esfera política de la existencia efectivamente subyace al propósito legitimador de la mitología y, como este estudio explora, así se representa de manera subversiva a lo largo de tradición, para socavar de hecho las ideologías dominantes articuladas en el relato mítico para perpetuar retóricamente la estasis político-social.

Por estos motivos aquí sintetizados, este trabjo toma en consideración de manera recurrente las hipótesis mito-ritualistas. No se trata en ningún caso de que esta investigación considere que dicho acercamiento crítico constituye una interpretación más correcta o más verdadera acerca del funcionamiento del pensamiento mito-poético. Como se ha explicado, este estudio valora la influencia decisiva que el mito-ritualismo ha tenido en la representación *literaria* del mito de la Tierra Baldía de manera específica. El objetivo de esta tesis doctoral, como ya se ha mencionado, no es analizar distintos enfoques mito-críticos y seleccionar uno de entre los muchos posibles como instrumento metodológico óptimo para conocer cuál es el verdadero significado de la mitología. Por el contrario, este estudio incorpora muchos de los argumentos más elocuentes que se han propuesto por muchos y muy diversos críticos del mito, quienes a lo largo de las décadas han formulado distintas hipótesis sobre los propósitos y el funcionamiento de la mitopoiesis en general, y de la mitología artúrica en particular. En todos los casos, no obstante, tales argumentos críticos y teóricos se aplican al comentario crítico de los textos propuestos a lo largo de este estudio, el cual persigue el objetivo de avanzar una hipótesis crítica acerca de la inmanencia del significado mítico en la literatura, esto es, del significado mítico socialmente construido e ideológicamente condicionado que de manera inevitable se reinterpreta mediante el proceso de representación y recreación literaria.

JUSTIFICACIÓN DEL CORPUS DE TEXTOS ANALIZADOS

Este trabajo de investigación está divido en cuatro partes, cada una de las cuales se ocupa de explorar los procesos de representación y reinterpretación del mito de la Tierra

Baldía en distintas etapas de las tradición literaria en lengua inglesa. La primera parte, titulada "El Rey Pescador," examina las remanencias míticas que perduran en el teatro político del Renacimiento inglés, explorando cómo tanto la estructura como los fundamentos ideológicos del mito resultan aún funcionales en las obras, a la vez que empiezan a ser cuestionados por una serie de contra-discursos que transforman esas bases mitológicas. Así, en primer lugar, esta parte analiza la obra histórica de Christopher Marlowe *Edward II* (ca. 1592), una obra cuya estructura discutiblemente funciona como correlato de un discurso legitimador que parece reactivar los temas y los patrones significativos del romance medieval, pero que de hecho articula un discurso subversivo por cómo reinterpreta simbólica y temáticamente los principios del mito de la Tierra Baldía. Se trata, como se explica en el trabajo, de uno de los primeros ejemplos en la tradición inglesa post-medieval que socava los principios legitimadores del mito como discurso de poder, un proceso subversivo que también se explora en el segundo capítulo de este trabajo, dedicado a la obra *Richard II* (ca. 1595), de William Shakespeare.

La elección de *Richard II* no obedece únicamente al hecho de que esta obra explicita de manera evidente cómo la superimposición de estructuras míticas (e ideológicas) sobre acontecimientos pasados trata de legitimizar e incluso redimir la violencia inherente a las estructuras de poder, sino también al hecho de que la obra ejemplifica a la perfección la futilidad de dicha empresa. En *Richard II*, el mito de la Tierra Baldía se representa como el contrapunto metafórico de un discurso de poder que nada puede hacer para restaurar el orden moral y espiritual a una sociedad violentada por una guerra civil, y en consecuencia el mito mismo se revela como una estrategia de legitimación en absoluto todopoderosa—una circunstancia que se exacerba en el estudio que este trabajo propone de otra de Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (ca. 1610), analizada en el tercer y último capítulo de la primera parte de esta tesis doctoral. Evidentemente, este capítulo traslada el foco de atención del género histórico al género del romance, en el cual se imbrica *per se* el mito de la Tierra Baldía.

The Tempest, como las obras históricas referidas, se estructura en torno al mito legitimador de la autoridad real, pero el estudio propuesto, apoyado en las hipótesis críticas del Nuevo Historicismo y de los estudios postcoloniales, arguye que la representación del mito de la Tierra Baldía es de hecho degenerativa, por cuanto expone la naturaleza contingente y arbitraria del significado del romance. Lejos de dar por buena la conexión mística entre el mundo político y el mundo natural que presupone

este género literario, *The Tempest* subvierte este principio ideológico, motivo por el cual este estudio parte del proceso mítico de reinterpretación en esta obra para iniciar una reevaluación del romance en términos más generales, focalizada en la exploración crítica de este género en la tradición británica en los siglos XVIII y XIX. De esto se ocupa, en efecto, la segunda parte de este trabajo de investigación, titulada "La Búsqueda del Caballero."

El cuarto capítulo de este trabajo, el primer capítulo de la segunda parte, se ocupa de explorar desde una perspectiva mito-crítica el subgénero del romance histórico, analizando dos obras: *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), de Horace Walpole, y *Waverley* (1814), de Walter Scott. La primera parte de este capítulo se ocupa de examinar el llamado 'Revival del Romance' que tuvo lugar en la literatura británica a mediados del siglo XVIII para argumentar que los nuevos romances, a pesar de su aparente literalismo, de hecho contienen una ideología disonante con respecto a los romances medievales, pues de hecho heredan los procesos mito-poéticos (subversivos) del Renacimiento, los cuales se exploran, como se ha explicado, en la primera parte de este trabajo. La segunda parte del capítulo se centra en el estudio de *Waverley*, un texto que ilustra elocuentemente la 'degeneración' del romance, pues emplea los patrones de este género para articular una narrativa de guerra civil, colonización, e irreparable pérdida cultural, abiertamente subvirtiendo así los principios legitimadores del mito medieval.

El siguiente capítulo continúa explorando la tendencia hacia la degeneración en los procesos de representación y reinterpretación del mito de la Tierra Baldía en la tradición literaria post-medieval que se explora a lo largo de este estudio. El texto elegido es *Idylls of the King* (1856-9 y 1868-74), de Lord, Alfred Tennyson, una actualización de los romances artúricos que reconfiguran el ideal social de Camelot como encarnación de la Tierra Baldía mítica, a la vez que establecen tal ideal como correlato de la Inglaterra victoriana contemporánea. Así, de hecho, los *Idilios* de Tennyson articulan en forma mítica las ansiedades políticas, ideológicas y culturales que inician la transmutación definitiva del romance medieval en anti-romance moderno, un proceso que cristalizará irrevocablemente en el romance imperial de degeneración, epítome del cual es, claro, *Heart of Dakrness* (1898), de Joseph Conrad—la novela corta analizada en el sexto capítulo de este trabajo, que cierra la segunda parte.

En este último capítulo, el mito de la Tierra Baldía se explora como patrón narrativo de degeneración que en última instancia socava los fundamentos de los

discursos de poder del siglo XIX en Gran Bretaña, anunciando proféticamente el horror que se avecinaba con el cambio de siglo y cuya mito-poética, llevada a cabo de manera explícita por el modernismo de posguerra, no puede entenderse sino como heredera natural del 'romance de degeneración' que, habiendo tomado forma progresivamente a lo largo del siglo XIX, *Heart of Darkness* establece ya como inescapable a los tiempos modernos. La tercera parte de este estudio se ocupa precisamente, por tanto, de ese modernismo de posguerra que hereda los patrones míticos subversivos del romance de degeneración. La pertinencia del mito de la Tierra Baldía como narración configurada en torno a los temas de la enfermedad, la esterilidad, la frustración, la muerte sacrificial, y, sobre todo, la esperanza de regeneración para una tierra desolada es evidente en el contexto histórico, cultural, moral y filosófico que sigue al horror de la Primera Guerra Mundial; ahora bien, no menos cierto es el hecho de que la reinterpretación degenerativa del mito en este *zeitgeist* no puede sino exacerbarse. Así, el mito premoderno se transforma en una herramienta para dar orden al caos y a la anarquía del espíritu de los tiempos modernista, pero inevitablemente el mito se desordena en consecuencia, y su funcionalidad como instrumento de integración social desaparece definitivamente.

Así queda ya configurado el paradigma mítico modernista en el poema *The Waste Land* (1922), de T. S. Eliot, de enorme influencia en la literatura anglo-americana a lo largo del siglo XX. Por ello el primer capítulo de la tercera parte de este trabajo elabora un estudio mito-crítico en profundidad de este texto, reevaluando el tema de la resurrección—inherente al mito de la Tierra Baldía—y cómo el contexto elegíaco del poema transforma el fin regenerador del mito premoderno en atributo de crueldad, precisamente a través de los principios metodológicos de *actualización* del mito. En efecto, la mito-poética modernista es manipuladora y deliberadamente intencionada, características que inician el proceso de deconstrucción mítica que este estudio explora en los siguientes capítulos—especialmente en la cuarta parte. En la tercera parte, sin embargo, el estudio de la mito-poética del modernismo en los Estados Unidos se centra en el estudio de las 'Novelas de la Tierra Baldía', la primera de las cuales, analizada en el capítulo ocho, es *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), de John Dos Pasos. En este novela, la ciudad moderna se configura como el correlato contemporáneo de la Tierra Baldía mítica, un correlato que, como se explica, a la vez opera como símbolo de una realidad que trasciende el cronotopos de Nueva York a principios del siglo XX y que se

representa en términos míticos como una sociedad desesperanzada, cuyos mecanismos comunitarios *deshacen* la vida y condenan a la alienación

El tercer capítulo de esta parte analiza *The Great Gatsby* (1925), de F. Scott Fitzgerald, un 'anti-romance' en el que todos los elementos y principios rectores que articulan el mito de la Tierra Baldía están de hecho presentes, pero se representan a la inversa. La mitología premoderna se hace coincidir con la mito-poética tradicional de los Estados Unidos para configurar de nuevo un romance de degeneración que, en este caso, transforma la idea mítica de los Estados Unidos entendidos como una 'tierra de abundancia' en la representación de una 'Tierra Baldía' estadounidense. Distinto pero estrechamente relacionado en términos ideológicos es el ejemplo de representación mítica explorado en el siguiente capítulo, el cual se ocupa de la última 'Novela de la Tierra Baldía' de la década de 1920 que se explora en este estudio: *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), de Ernest Hemingway. En esta novela, el protagonista huye de la Tierra Baldía, consciente de la imposibilidad de curación, sólo para descubrir que no existe ya un lugar, no importa cómo de recóndito o primitivo sea éste, donde los ritos ancestrales de fertilidad que constituyen el núcleo místico del mito premoderno puedan restablecer la prosperidad de la Tierra Baldía mítica. Ésta no se circunscribe ya a un espacio delimitado, sino que por el contrario se ha transformado en una condición generalizada de desolación espiritual que es ya inherente a la sociedad del siglo XX.

Tal es el punto de partida de la última parte de este estudio, el cual analiza los procesos de 'literalización' y deconstrucción mítica que siguen a las 'Novelas de la Tierra Baldía' de los años veinte, los cuales se llevan a cabo mediante un fenómenos de 'multivalencia' mítica que alcanza su paroxismo en la estética y la ideología del posmodernismo literario en los Estados Unidos. El primer capítulo de esta parte, no obstante, explora una 'Novela de la Tierra Baldía' que es heredera directa del modernismo de posguerra: *To a God Unknown* (1933), de John Steinbeck. El motivo por el cual esta novela inaugura la última parte de este estudio, no obstante, es la ambivalencia mítica que caracteriza la reinterpretación degenerativa del mito en el texto, así como la representación del mitema del Grial como un talismán de muerte. Ambos rasgos definitorios de la 'tradición de la Tierra Baldía' después del modernismo quedan así prefigurados en un texto que, como *Nightwood* (1937), de Djuna Barnes, analizado en el segundo capítulo de esta parte, establece una relación de continuidad entre las novelas modernistas de los años 20 y la tradición posmodernista que se desarrollará en décadas posteriores. Como la novela de Steinbeck pero de manera más

exacerbada, la novela de Barnes presenta un universo mítico ambivalente en el que las figuras de Rey Pescador adoptan el papel de sanadores, y los Caballeros de Grial están (o caen) tan enfermos como el Rey Tullido a quien deberían sanar. El significado de curación mística del mito premoderno se transfigura en una narrativa de contagio, un elemento de subversión en la representación del mito de la Tierra Baldía que también aparece en la siguiente novela examinada, *The Natural* (1952), de Bernard Malamud.

El tercer capítulo de esta última parte se ocupa de nuevo del análisis de un contexto de posguerra, y por tanto se centra en desvelar cómo la idealización de la década de 1950 por parte de la sociedad estadounidense actual constituye de hecho un proceso mitologizante que se desarrolló en décadas posteriores y que busca legitimar una ideología conservadora dominante. Así, esta nueva mito-poética legitimadora se contrapone a las estrategias de representación mítica de la novela de Malamud, las cuales son extraordinariamente complejas y subversivas, y hacen uso de la mencionada 'multivalencia' mítica y de la 'literalización' del mito, las dos características fundamentales de los procesos de representación mítica que definen la reinterpretación posmodernista del mito de la Tierra Baldía. Esta reinterpretación posmodernista se explora en este estudio en los dos últimos capítulos, el primero de los cuales analiza *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962), de Ken Kesey. En esta novela, la representación del mito es cada vez más literal, menos simbólica. Igualmente, el proceso de representación mítica 'multivalente' se consolida, hasta el punto de que el mito se *re-crea* para significar simultáneamente una cosa y lo contrario. Se rompe definitivamente la relación —asumida como natural e inquebrantable— entre el significante textual y el significado mítico, lo cual lleva a este estudio a adoptar la perspectiva crítica de la post-modernidad, circunscrita al ámbito artístico del postmodernismo literario en los Estados Unidos.

Ésta es la perspectiva crítica que cierra este estudio, el cual concluye con la exploración mito-crítica de dos novelas de Thomas Pynchon: *V.* (1963), y *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966). Este último capítulo formula el concepto de 'remitologización' por cuanto este fenómeno explica como las novelas de Pynchon reutilizan las metáforas rectoras de las 'Novelas de la Tierra Baldía' para transformar el romance del Grial en una narración de búsqueda de la aniquilación de toda forma de vida. En las obras de Pynchon analizadas, el proceso de simbolización que supuestamente transformó el rito en mito, y el mito en símbolo, tal y como se explora a lo largo de este estudio, se revierte: la representación del mito resulta tan literal que pasa a articular ritos de vida.

Pero la nueva vida ya no está desconectada del orden social, o henchida de muerte, o enferma sin remedio. La nueva vida carece de vida; niega la vida: es artificial, prostética y para siempre inanimada. Es el fin último de la 'multivalencia' mítica que lleva a la identificación simultánea de salvador y salvado, en términos míticos, y que da cuenta definitiva de la imposibilidad de regeneración ahora incluso como elemento constitutivo del mito. Constituye esto no obstante una etapa diferencia en la tradición del mito de la Tierrra Baldía en la literatura en lengua inglesa que sirve de hecho para cerrar el análisis transhistórico elaborado a lo largo de este estudio, que incorpora así la tradición británica y estadounidense desde el contexto post-medieval hasta la literatura postmodernista.

CONCLUSIONES

LA DESMITOLOGIZACÓN DE LA HISTORIA

Como ya se ha esbozado brevemente, la primera parte de este estudio se centra en explorar cómo se articulan las ansiedades políticas de la Inglaterra renacentista a través de un proceso de representación mítica que representa de manera paradójica un proceso de desacralización de la realeza para con ello subvertir las estructuras míticas que articulan la historiografía Tudor. Así, el análisis mito-crítico llevado a cabo en este estudio se centra inicialmente en el examen de las intersecciones de mito, la historia y el romance en el teatro político inglés de finales del siglo XVI y principios del siglo XVII. Las figuras reales en las tres obras seleccionadas —*Edward II*, de Christopher Marlowe, *Richard II* y *The Tempest*, de William Shakespeare, es decir, dos obras históricas y un romance— se exploran por tanto desde una perspectiva mito-crítica como arquetipos del 'rey trágico', en base a la hipótesis de que la representación de los procesos históricos (tanto en la historiografía como en el teatro) participaba de la estructura cíclica y repetitiva de los ritos y, en efecto, de la mito-poética, y que por tanto esta representación daba cuenta de relatos míticos arquetípicos, que sin embargo se subvierten en las obras exploradas. Así, en estos primeros capítulos se argumenta que en estas obras la recurrencia mítica de hecho da cuenta de un estado de degeneración política, histórica y moral, una hipótesis que inicia así el argumento fundamental de este estudio: la

inmanencia ideológicamente subversiva que caracteriza de hecho a la representación degenerativa del mito premoderno de la Tierra Baldía a lo largo tradición literaria post-medieval en el contexto angloamericano.

En esta primera parte del estudio, la noción de "emplotment" de White es crucial para comprender la dimensión mítica de los textos examinados. De hecho, el sustrato mítico de las obras analizadas se debe a que los hechos históricos han de transformarse en narraciones para que puedan ser comprensibles y explicativos. Este argumento se repite a lo largo de todo este estudio, ya que la función de la mitología no puede separarse de la necesidad de hacer que el caos y la anarquía inherentes a la existencia humana puedan ser comprendidos (y entendidos) por la conciencia humana. En el caso de la historiografía inglesa del siglo XVI, esta necesidad determina precisamente que la historia medieval adquiera la forma de una categoría cultural conocida de antemano, esto es, el romance, que se convierte así en la estructura que da forma a las narrativas historiográficas y, por extensión, a las obras históricas que se basan en tales narrativas.

Tal es, sin duda, el caso de *Edward II*, una obra en la que el rey se decribe retóricamente como un rey enfermo que, en consecuencia, gobierna sobre un reino desolado. Los rebeldes que declaran la guerra al rey, en sus propias palabras, están tratando de sanarle y así salvar el reino, en efecto codificando en términos míticos la revolución y posterior restauración política que articulan la trama de la obra y la intersección de discursos y contra-discursos de poder, esto es, la ideología dominante de la época (la teoría providencialista de la monarquía), y el incipiente pensamiento proto-constitucional. Esta intersección se articula precisamente a través de la superposición de un patrón mítico premoderno sobre la dramatización de una revuelta aparentemente antinatural contra el rey legítimo. El efecto está lejos de ser conciliador. La cosmología naturalizada del relato mítico que ordena los acontecimientos históricos se contrapone, en efecto, a la exposición de la violencia inherente a la guerra, lo cual subvierte las expectativas de restauración mítica que pudiera albergar el público. En consecuencia, los temas y las estructuras míticas de la obra se revelan así como una estrategia de legitimación transitoria y contradictoria, al servicio a una intencionalidad política específica. El asesinato del rey, discutiblemente ritual, resulta demasiado brutal y queda así configurado como un acto de profanación que disocia de manera irreversible la restauración del orden político del equilibrio cósmico y trascendente de la mitología. Este equilibrio se expone, por el contrario, como una ficción vana, una estrategia retórica que idealiza y justifica la violencia y las políticas de poder que permiten la

continuidad de las estructuras sociales establecidas. En consecuencia, el *mythos* que estructura las narrativas históricas y que trata de legitimar la autoridad de aquéllos en el poder comienza a *desnaturalizarse*. El orden político se restaura en la figura del heredero legítimo del verdadero rey, pero se desvanece la ilusión de que tal restitución política esté legitimada místicamente por un orden sobrenatural que organiza y sostiene la autoridad del rey. De hecho, el patrón de la mitología del romance estructura el argumento de la obra, pero no contiene el significado, una circunstancia que, en efecto, inicia la dramatización del cambio mítico que caracteriza a la representación de la monarquía en el teatro político del Renacimiento inglés.

Tal y como se argumenta a lo largo de estudio, el mito puede entenderse como un tipo de narración que articula la ideología dominante de una comunidad, y cuya teleología es por tanto principalmente social. El mito entonces transforma en una historia un credo común que unifica y estructura grupos sociales, los cuales son necesariamente diversos, jerárquicos y conflictivos. Se trata así de una narrativa dominante, aceptada por el colectivo, que intenta ordenar el mundo y que, en la medida en que inventa un universo totalmente armonizado, también da lugar a un conjunto de axiomas morales que, por cuanto han sido extraídos de un cosmos místico supuestamente inmutable, condicionan de hecho el comportamiento social a través de la *naturalización* de la ética. Puede así argumentarse que el mito no sólo explica el mundo, sino que también organiza la cultura, y, en consecuencia, una vez que el mito se expresa en la literatura, éste intenta poner en orden el caos de una experiencia de vida que necesita ser condensada, adaptada y contenida en un patrón narrativo convencional para ser aprehendida. En el caso de las obras analizadas en la primera parte de este estudio, las estructuras míticas intentan organizar el misterio caótico de los acontecimientos del pasado que, por existir en el pasado, no pueden ser conocidos fuera de la representación. Sin embargo, una vez se representan como una narrativa mítica, el substrato mítico se vuelve maleable y, como es una constante en todos los textos analizados en esta tesis, la maleabilidad del mito finalmente revela su falta de fiabilidad como fuente de verdadero significado.

Así ocurre de manera evidente con el mito Tudor, tal y como este se representa, según puede argüirse, en *Richard II*. En esta obra, aquella narración mítica se limita a estructurar la trama histórica, pero se reinterpreta de manera que lo que fue configurado en origen como una narrativa de restauración se transforma en un mito de degeneración, el cual se articula dramáticamente a través de la transformación irreversible de

Inglaterra que, en términos míticos, pasa de concebirse como un paraíso edénico a representarse como en una Tierra Baldía mítica irreparable. Una vez más, los acontecimientos representados en el escenario traen consigo la restauración del orden político pero, en términos míticos, el reino sigue siendo una tierra baldía moral y espiritual tras la muerte y la sucesión del Rey Tullido. Mito y rito operan por tanto como herramientas estructurales que tratan de ordenador una realidad violenta y caótica, pero ambos se revelan como estrategias inútiles de legitimación cuando Henry, el sucesor de Richard, termina por violentar el orden moral 'natural' de la misma manera que Richard lo había hecho. Ambos son culpables de fratricidio, un delito tabú, y por lo tanto, ambos son condenados a soportar el castigo de Caín: convertirse en el rey de la Tierra Baldía, al este del Edén.

La reinterpretación mítica es perversa, ya que la estructura mítica de la obra repite el crimen primordial cometido por el rey de manera que la dramatización del reinado de Ricardo II no concluya en un momento álgido de regeneración, sino que, por el contrario, tal dramatización —estructuralmente mítica— agrave el estado de pérdida mística y espiritual que asola la Tierra Baldía que se representa en el escenario. Efectivamente, la obra de Shakespeare dramatiza el restablecimiento del orden político, pero dicha restauración se lleva a cabo en una Tierra Baldía donde el "otro Edén" de Inglaterra no podrá recuperarse jamás. Se articula así un cambio mítico que se produce en la transición de la edad media a la modernidad histórica, el cual se significa textualmente como una inversión del movimiento ideológico de romance: en lugar de representar la transición de la Tierra Baldía que se transforma en un Edén, el cambio mítico representad en *Richard II* y en las otras obras analizadas en la primera parte de este estudio representa la transformación simbólica de Inglaterra, de Edén en Tierra Baldía irredimible.

Por ello estas obras reinterpretan relatos míticos para desafiar los discursos dominantes articulados por éstos, y lo hacen mediante la representación del mito y del rito como estrategias retóricas inútiles, vacías, frustradas y en última instancia incapaces de otorgar un significado estable, unificador e indiscutible. En términos políticos, tal anulación de la trascendencia mítica tiene como resultado una invalidación de la monarquía como institución sancionada divinamente, y los mitos de la realeza se revelan en consecuencia como las ideologías de poder que de manera simultánea se representan y se vacían de trascendencia, una circunstancia que puede rastrearse en todos los textos explorados a lo largo de este estudio. De este modo, la identificación

inseparable entre la autoridad real y el gobierno providencial se deconstruye eficazmente, lo cual constituye un proceso de subversión mítica inseparable del contexto en el que se genera el texto, ya que esta subversión expone cómo en Inglaterra, en la época de Shakespeare, el orden social y político era bastante inestable y estaba de hecho sostenido por las 'palabras vacías' que constituían las estrategias de legitimación de una retórica política que más adelante se designaría con la etiqueta de 'Mito Tudor'.

El caso de *The Tempest* es ligeramente diferente, pues, como es evidente, en esta obra el mito del romance no está mediado por el filtro de la historiografía, sino representado de una manera aparentemente directa. Asumiendo como cierta la hipótesis de que el "modo" de romance se define por su temática y no por su forma, se puede en efecto argumentar que la ideología del romance establece que restauración política y regeneración natural (y espiritual) son inextricables, y, así se representan, según puede parecer, en la última obra de William Shakespeare. No obstante, esta aparente representación del romance es, como argumenta este estudio, sólo eso: una *representación* dentro de la obra, que de hecho reemplaza el rito con una mascarada, es decir, con una *imagen* del rito que se encuadra en el mundo sin trascendencia que ha resultado tras el cambio mítico ocurrido en la transición hacia la modernidad histórica. Puede así argüirse entonces que el romance funciona en *The Tempest* también como un instrumento para construir la trama, empleado en este caso por Próspero para estructurar y atribuir un significado interesado a una narrativa política que acontece en un mundo donde la redención espiritual ya no es posible. En consecuencia, la obra dramatiza un conflicto entre una realidad anárquica y caótica, y las limitaciones del mito como estrategia ideológica que busca imponer forma, orden y sentido a una vida irredimible. El ajuste de esa vida a las reglas morales y mágicas de la mitología resulta transitorio y frágil. El resultado es que el romance de regeneración escenificado por Próspero, una mascarada jacobina que dramatiza la restauración de un rey legítimo, elaborada en torno a los temas del perdón, la restauración política, la renovación natural y la redención espiritual, se convierte en efecto en la dramatización de una historia de degeneración. Porque el orden político, junto con su legitimación a través de la ideología del romance, se representa como una construcción falsa que no está determinada cosmológicamente y que por tanto no puede dar lugar a una regeneración de la vida, ya que existe sólo en el ámbito del arte, del mito. El mito se representa fuera de la vida, sustituyendo a la vida, y por lo tanto su reinterpretación niega activamente la posibilidad de regeneración a través de la reactivación de la mitología romance. Éste es el contra-discurso de *The Tempest*

que, junto con las otras dos obras examinados en la primera parte de este estudio, revela la inmanencia del mito una vez éste se representa en la literatura, una revelación que vacía todo rastro de trascendencia legitimadora del relato mítico premoderno y en consecuencia disocia la organización social del poder de cualquier alegación mítica (y por tanto supuestamente irrefutable) de naturalidad, cosmología preternatural o cualquier otro tipo de providencialismo.

EL NUEVO ROMANCE

La segunda parte de esta tesis analiza la remodelación del romance y de la mitología del romance a lo largo del siglo XIX, después del llamado 'Revival del Romance' en el siglo XVIII, coincidente con el nacimiento de la literatura gótica. Estableciendo una continuidad de significado con los textos explorados en la primera parte de este estudio, el análisis de los nuevos romances en la tradición británica de la Ilustración comienza examinando cómo los mitos del romance se vacían de su significado original en la era moderna, y cómo este significado se transforman para que los mitos recién reescritos puedan dar cuenta del contexto social e ideológico específico de los siglos XVIII y XIX en Gran Bretaña. El primer paso en este proceso, que puede examinarse en *The Castle of Otranto*, de Horace Walpole, ocurre cuando los significantes góticos que caracterizan el nuevo romance no funcionan como referentes de "verdaderas" referencias medievales, sino que por el contrario remiten a la recreación "falsa" renacentista de aquéllas, es decir, a las *representaciones* del medioevo analizadas en la primera parte de este trabajo. El resultado es que el nuevo romance de hecho vuelve a 'falsificar' lo que ya era falso en origen, y por ello los mitos del romance (específicamente el mito de la Tierra Baldía) se representan de forma inmanente, carentes de un significado único, lo cual facilita que sean reapropiados y 're-significados' con el objetivo de legitimar cualquier discurso dominante o ideología de poder. Así, el nuevo romance 'ilustrado' trata de articular las tensiones sociales y políticas de una época en la que el capitalismo burgués ha sustituido a la aristocracia como la fuerza social dominante. Los mitos del romance deben entonces ser rehechos para dar cuenta del nuevo orden social y por lo tanto su agenda legitimadora de las estructuras políticas que arbitraron el feudalismo se modifica para intentar ahora *naturalizar* un nuevo orden social dominado por el

mercantilismo y la búsqueda del beneficio económico privado. Los mitos que solían resolver los conflictos dinásticos se reconfiguran así para arbitrar conflictos por herencias de dinero y propiedades, y se imbrican con el sentir de las clase medias y alto-burguesas.

Esta forma de 'resurgir del romance' y de evolución del romance, a pesar de que es inextricable en sus orígenes de la literatura gótica, se alinea más tarde con la representación de los mitos en algunos textos clave del romanticismo a lo largo del siglo XIX. Ése es claramente el caso de *Waverley*, de Walter Scott, que representa de manera bastante compleja las estructuras del romance para narrar una historia de disolución cultural e histórica, la cual sin embargo parece compadecerse perfectamente con el patrón tradicional de un romance de restauración. Como se argumenta en este estudio, la novela parece presentar una paradoja irresoluble: la representación *pesimista* de un romance *tradicional*. Tal paradoja, sin embargo, en un proceso similar pero tal vez más explícito que en el caso de las obras de teatro explorados en la primera parte de este estudio, en realidad revela cómo las convenciones del romance son una tergiversación deliberada que hace coincidir la narración de un conjunto de acontecimientos históricos con los parámetros ideológicos de la clase dominante, intentando legitimar *ex post facto* una situación de violencia, dominio y colonización cultural. Por lo tanto puede argumentarse que el romance 'ilustrado' que puede rastrearse en la novela de Scott intenta naturalizar y legitimar el orden social de la Inglaterra Hannover, al moldear la historia del matrimonio restaurador (en términos políticos y sociales) del joven Waverley en base a la forma de un romance tradicional de regeneración. Sin embargo, este nuevo romance de triunfo nacional que relata la restauración de las Tierras Bajas de Escocia, unionistas, se contrapone directamente con un 'viejo romance' sobre mitos dinásticos que, de hecho, narra la pérdida irreparable de la cultura de las Tierras Altas. De hecho, el romance ilustrado de las Tierras Bajas desplaza el 'romance de pérdida' de las Tierras Altas, pues ambos narran la misma historia, es decir, dan forma a la misma Historia y, como resultado, el mito que narra la restauración de las Tierras Bajas (baldías) se revela como una fabricación interesad dirigida a naturalizar las estructuras de poder del colonialismo.

Explícitamente, esta remodelación interesada del mito se representa a través de un proceso por medio del cual el nuevo romance reinterpreta el mito de la Tierra Baldía como carente de magia y misticismo, dando cuenta de una sociedad ordenada que ya no está en equilibrio con las fuerzas sobrenaturales del cosmos, pero que está sin embargo

legitimada por la retórica del progreso. El romance se torna abiertamente maleable y renuncia a un origen arquetípico; el credo del progreso sustituye a la trascendencia mítica. En el viejo romance de las Tierras Altas, la fuerza legitimadora del mito dinástico premoderno es sólo temporal, y termina colonizada por los mitos del progreso. La restauración de la dinastía Estuardo al trono británico se reescribe para dar forma a una narración unionista que concluye cuando Waverley, un joven inglés, se convierte en el legítimo heredero de un feudo en las Tierras Bajas, dando así una nueva forma a un mito que se legitima a través de la fe en el progreso (económico). La regeneración comunitaria que acontece en las Tierras Bajas al final de la novela no es consecuencia de la trascendencia mítica, sino de la prosperidad económica y del crecimiento mercantilista. Sólo el éxito comercial y la *ethos* pragmatista pueden restaurar la nueva Tierra Baldía mítica, pero dicha restauración se representa en Waverley como inseparable de la disolución política y cultural de otra Tierra Baldía que no sólo no puede ser restaurada por las fuerzas del progreso, sino que de hecho debe permanecer literal y metafóricamente devastada (por el progreso) para garantizar la restitución de la cultura colonizadora dominante, cuya prosperidad se ha desligado definitivamente del *mythos* místico y armonizador del 'viejo romance'.

En consecuencia, la representación y la reinterpretación del mito Tierra Baldía a lo largo del siglo XIX sólo pueden dar cuenta de un ideal de progreso corrupto que apenas puede ocultar la condición desolada de una sociedad ilustrada que de hecho iba ya encaminada hacia el terror imprevisible y sin precedentes de la Primera Guerra Mundial. Ésa es, de hecho, la implicación subyacente que puede rastrearse en *Idylls of the King*, de Alfred, Lord Tennyson, epítome del romance victoriano medievalista. Esta serie épica de poemas profetiza la inexorabilidad de la degeneración social y política que estaba conduciendo a la sociedad del progreso hacia la inimaginable Tierra Baldía moral y espiritual que resultaría de la Gran Guerra. Puede así afirmarse, entonces, que los *Idilios* de Tennyson constituyen en efecto la primera instancia examinada a lo largo de este estudio de una reinterpretación del mito de la Tierra Baldía como mito de degeneración colectiva, significando esta degeneración no ya el colapso del viejo mundo representado en la mitología premoderna y sin cabida en la modernidad histórica, sino el colapso de la propia modernidad histórica. Los *Idilios* son el primer ejemplo analizado en esta tesis del mito de la Tierra Baldía reinterpretado por la modernidad estética.

Como ha sido resumido brevemente en estas conclusiones, la representación literaria de mitos 'huecos' que se vacían de su fuerza legitimadora ha sido una constante a lo largo de este estudio. Desde el siglo XIX en adelante, no obstante, esta 'falsedad del mito' se asocia a la falta de fundamento de los ideales de la modernidad, y, por fin, como se detalla en la cuarta parte de esta tesis, tal falsedad se identifica como una característica inherente de la mitopoética. En *Idylls of the King*, sin embargo, la representación del mito de la Tierra Baldía da cuenta de la falta de fundamento de la ética victoriana como quintaesencia del orden social, el progreso y la civilización, y lo hace mediante la presentación de un romance cuyo movimiento de regeneración se invierte de forma explícita: la herida del rey divino y la consiguiente desolación del reino se desplazan para convertirse en la resolución fatal de la historia de Camelot, que, como se explica en el capítulo cinco de este trabajo, funciona a la vez en los poemas como metáfora y metonimia del Imperio Británico contemporáneo. De este modo, el ideal de una civilización superior se recrea de forma explícita como una Tierra Baldía mítica que no ofrece esperanzas de restauración, ya que la estructura circular de los *Idilios* de hecho articula un descenso social, moral y espiritual hacia el caos. Los mitos se representan como ficciones aceptadas socialmente que pueden sostener la ilusión de la civilización sólo durante un período corto de tiempo, a la vez necesarios e inútiles a la hora de garantizar el orden social en un momento en el que las estructuras políticas que sostenían el equilibrio social eran, de hecho, una mera *representación* del poder. Camelot y el Rey Arturo se representan como ilusiones místicas y, de manera significativa, sus respectivas transformaciones en Tierra Baldía y Rey Tullido revelan que tales representaciones míticas de poder y de orden están de hecho condenadas a colapsar y desatar el caos deletéreo de un mundo que ya no puede ser totalmente ordenado, aprehendido y contenida dentro de los frágiles límites del pensamiento mito-poético.

Tal y como se representa en la literatura británica a finales del siglo XIX, por tanto, el mito aparece únicamente como inmanente y carente de fuerza mística; se representa incluso en proceso de pérdida de su funcionalidad más pragmática, esto es, de su utilidad como dispositivo ordenador de la realidad. Porque en realidad, esta teleología ilustrada comienza a derrumbarse a la par que los demás ideales de la ilustración, como se explica en el capítulo sexto de esta tesis, el cual se ocupa de *Heart of Darkness*, de Joseph Conrad, desde una perspectiva mito-crítica. En la novela de Conrad, como se explica, el ideal ilustrado de un progreso ilimitado resulta en la

deificación del hombre blanco colonizador, esto es, en un proceso de transformación mística que sin embargo está codificado (y por lo tanto socavado) por la retórica característica de la teoría de la degeneración. La funcionalidad de la mitología del romance en el texto se circunscribe entonces a esta retórica, y por ello se presenta el viaje de Marlow es busca de Kurtz como una búsqueda del Grial fracasada, sin rumbo, y degenerativa, por cuanto la estructura de la búsqueda se torna cíclica. En consecuencia, la representación subversiva y abiertamente degenerativa de la mitología del romance articula un comentario sobre los propios mitos de la Ilustración, es decir, los relatos legitimadores de la Ilustración científica y filosófica que en realidad obedecen al mismo propósito que la mito-poética: *naturalizar* una explicación específica del mundo que establece la inmutabilidad de un statu quo socialmente injusto. Esta hipótesis, como se argumenta en el análisis de *Heart of Darkness*, puede trasladarse sin dificultad a un contexto de colonización en el que, por ende, el discurso ilustrado del progreso y el discurso mitológico se combinan para presentar al hombre ilustrado como a una figura divina. Sin embargo, como se explica, el hombre-dios ilustrado en la novela corta de Conrad, Kurtz, se redefine en el texto a la luz de la teoría de la degeneración, y por lo tanto el ideal que aquél representa se revela como un ideal de destrucción.

Al igual que en otros textos examinados a lo largo de este estudio, el patrón de la búsqueda mítica se invierte en *Heart of Darkness*, y la figura del Caballero del Grial se encuentra con el Rey Tullido (Usurpador) al final del relato, en un momento álgido en el que se hace coincidir este encuentro mítico con la frustración de un rito de sacrificio que sólo dos décadas más tarde se convertiría en inseparable de la representación literaria del mito de la Tierra Baldía. Tanto el mito como el rito se representan entonces como inútiles. El caballero fracasa en su tarea de sanar al Rey Tullido, podría decirse que por cuanto confunde la figura de un hombre-dios degenerado con un Grial ilustrado y por tanto supuestamente redentor. En termines rituales, además, el Caballero también fracasa: ni mata ni sucede al rey enfermo. Así, el mito de la Tierra Baldía se reinterpreta abiertamente como una historia de degeneración cuyo significado no puede encontrarse en la estructura del texto (en forma de romance), si no que debe rastrearse en las imágenes recurrentes de enfermedad, muerte y decadencia que impregnan la narrativa y subvierten el ideal victoriano de progreso, reinterpretando radicalmente el mito premoderno y estableciendo así una continuidad de significado con la literatura del modernismo de posguerra, que es abiertamente mítica y, claro, abiertamente degenerativa.

LA NUEVA FORMA DEL MITO

Las 'novelas de la Tierra Baldía' del modernismo estadounidense, tal y como se explora en la tercera parte de este estudio, constituyen sin duda el proceso más claro y explícito de representación y reinterpretación del mito de la Tierra Baldía en la tradición literaria angloamericana. En estas novelas, el mito premoderno se convierte en el correlato más elocuente y más funcional del espíritu de los tiempos que siguieron a la Gran Guerra, y así se manifiesta en una serie de textos altamente influyentes que se generaron en un período muy corto de tiempo. Esta circunstancia no sólo define el canon estadounidense de la década de los años veinte, sino que además determina la importancia (y la eventual deconstrucción mítica) del imaginario de la Tierra Baldía a lo largo del siglo XX en la literatura de los Estados Unidos. Indudablemente, la prominencia del mito de la Tierra Baldía en la literatura estadounidense del siglo XX es inseparable de los avances académicos en el ámbito de los estudios artúricos que se desarrollan a comienzos de siglo, como se ha explicado, por cuanto se refiere a la pertinencia del mito-ritualismo como escuela de pensamiento. También es innegable que la imagen mítica de la Tierra Baldía resulta bastante elocuente para articular los efectos post-traumáticos de no una, sino dos guerras mundiales, sobre todo en el contexto de los Estados Unidos, donde la noción de una Tierra Baldía mítica irreparable se configura en oposición directa a la concepción mítica de aquel país y de su representación estética como Edén restaurado o tierra de abundancia. Sin embargo, para entender la (casi) omnipresencia del mito de la Tierra Baldía en la literatura de Estados Unidos tras la Primera Guerra Mundial, es fundamental tener en cuenta la influencia de *The Waste Land*, de T. S. Eliot, el gran poema modernista que representa explícitamente la desolación de la Europa de posguerra como analogía de la desolación de la Tierra Baldía en la mitología artúrica medieval.

La Tierra Baldía mítica se convierte entonces en la metáfora más expresiva para caracterizar el mundo de posguerra, un mundo horrorizado y plagado de muerte. En el poema de Eliot, el mito vertebra la gran complejidad de referencias míticas, históricas, religiosas y culturales que dan forma al texto. La influencia del mito-ritualismo no puede ignorarse en esta representación mítica, ya que determina la presencia recurrente de temas y motivos rituales en el poema y en la tradición inmediatamente posterior. Pero quizás lo más significativo, desde el punto de vista mito-ritualista, sea el hecho de

que desde esta visión los mitos se teorizan como inseparables de un significado místico que contiene la promesa de bienestar social para la comunidad. La invalidación de ese núcleo ritual del mito de la Tierra Baldía, tal y como se representa en el modernismo estadounidense, viene a significar entonces la imposibilidad de supervivencia de la comunidad y, progresivamente, tal invalidación da forma a una reinterpretación verdaderamente apocalíptica del mito.

De hecho, la Primera Guerra Mundial dio lugar a un sentimiento generalizado de angustia y desesperanza que en efecto niega la posibilidad de rehabilitación, un fenómeno que se representa en *The Waste Land* a través de la clara disonancia entre el renacimiento literal e ineludible de la tierra en primavera, y las circunstancias sociales de un mundo que ha sido desolado por una catástrofe inmensa e irreparable. La restauración física de la Tierra Baldía se representa en consecuencia como un acto morbosamente cruel, ya que perpetúa indefinidamente una existencia henchida de muerte para quienes estan condenados a permanecer entre los vivos. La estructura cíclica del poema atrapa al lector en el patrón recurrente de un mito que se ha desordenado y se ha reorganizado para articular un significado de degeneración. El patrón de la búsqueda del héroe puede ser intuido en el poema, pero sólo funciona como encarnación simbólica de un fallo ritual que es omnipresente en el texto. El significado de la resurrección está constantemente subvertido, en un proceso de 'multivalencia' simbólica por medio del cual todos los referentes adquieren un significado polisémico que socava cada momento de (aparente) regeneración en el texto. Este proceso, como se argumenta a lo largo de este estudio, inicia un proceso de ambigüedad simbólica que evolucionará en las décadas posteriores hacia un proceso de 'multivalencia' mítica. En el poema de Eliot, sin embargo, esta *simbología* ambivalente sirve para crear una serie de paradojas que presentan un yermo que aparentemente renace, pero donde sólo la muerte puede germinar. Porque toda nueva vida nace de una tierra donde se han 'plantado' los cadáveres de millones de víctimas de la guerra y donde estos ahora se levantan de sus tumbas, haciéndose indistinguibles sobre la tierra de los fantasmas de quienes sobrevivieron. Ésa es la nueva Tierra Baldía mítica, re-significada como eterna e irredimible.

La potencia regenerativa e imparable de la vida natural es inseparable del significado ritual que subyace al mito, como también lo es del mito premoderno que presenta la desolación del reino del Rey Tullido como una situación transitoria que ha de resolverse al final del relato. La esterilidad física de la tierra, la figura icónica del

Rey Pescador y el patrón ritual que, según se cree a principios del siglo XX, da forma al mito, son motivos recurrentes en *The Waste Land*, pero la restauración final de la tierra desolada que acontece (o debería acontecer) en el romance tradicional se reinterpreta en el poema como un acto de crueldad, ya que sólo sirve para preservar la vida física, por así decirlo, en una tierra espiritual y moralmente muerta. El mito de la Tierra Baldía se representa por tanto en el poema, pero reinterpretado explícitamente para articular un lamento elegíaco en torno a las devastadoras consecuencias de la guerra. Una historia tradicional de regeneración no sólo se presenta así como una fabricación convencional que, a veces, resulta parcialmente satisfactoria para explicar el mundo y legitimar un determinado orden de cosas. Dando fe de la consolidación de la modernidad estética, y por tanto representando en términos míticos el colapso de la modernidad histórica, *The Waste Land* presenta la remodelación explícita de una narrativa de restauración convertida en un relato de degeneración irreparable.

Así ocurre también en la primera 'Novela de la Tierra Baldía' analizada en este estudio, *Manhattan Transfer*, de John Dos Passos. La representación de la ciudad moderna en esta novela como analogía literaria, o mejor como símbolo (en el sentido Simbolista, valga el aparente pleonasmo) de la Tierra Baldía mítica, tal y como se explica en el capítulo octavo de este estudio, expone cómo la ciudad post-ilustrada opera de una manera muy similar al pensamiento mito-poético, por cuanto ambas construcciones tratan de controlar, gobernar y establecer un orden (político) sobre el caos social que define la vida de la comunidad —de la comunidad urbana, en el caso de la ciudad. Como se representa en la novela de Dos Passos, los ciudadanos de Manhattan están disociados, *fracturados* y han sido deshumanizados por las instituciones culturales que arbitran la vida en la ciudad. Se representan como los habitantes de una Tierra Baldía contemporánea, de tal manera que la simbolización de la ciudad en la novela trasciende los límites de la representación metafórica y de la aparente crítica social. La ciudad de Manhattan, en la novela de Dos Passos, opera en realidad como el correlato de una civilización corrupta, perdida y espiritualmente estéril, cuyos ciudadanos experimentan un sufrimiento que va más allá del descontento neurótico de una comunidad urbana. Como resultado, *Manhattan Transfer* también mitifica el espíritu de los tiempos de posguerra, retratando los procesos de cristalización y deshumanización por medio de los cuales los ciudadanos quedan atrapados en una existencia de 'muerte en vida' que se emblematiza simbólicamente a través de su aversión por la vida. La ciudad se recrea de este modo como un espacio mítico en descomposición donde ni

siquiera la muerte puede traer consigo nuevas formas de vida, porque sólo existe en este espacio mítico una imitación de la vida que inútilmente intenta ocultar la aridez que define la existencia de los personajes.

Sin embargo, la desolación que se extiende por esta Tierra Baldía urbana no tiene etiología o cura; no se presenta como la consecuencia de una causa externa que tal vez podría solventarse. La ciudad moderna, como símbolo de la existencia modernista, se representa como intrínsecamente estéril y enferma. Dicha representación, tal y como se explica, se lleva a cabo mediante una reinterpretación del mito de la Tierra Baldía que se basa en la transmutación del significado de símbolos convencionales de regeneración (flores, fuego y agua). Estos símbolos, en la novela, contienen en su significado la presencia ubicua de la muerte que no ofrece redención. El resultado es una representación *apocalíptica* del relato mítico tradicional. La identificación de Manhattan con la Tierra Baldía mítica que tan a menudo emblematizó el *zeitgeist* modernista desencantado no recrea simplemente la difícil situación de una comunidad en la que las estructuras sociales y políticas ya no están en armonía con la cosmología preternatural de la mitología. Por el contrario, la representación de la ciudad de Nueva York como análoga a la Tierra Baldía dibuja la vida social e institucional de la metrópolis moderna como una forma de sociedad que petrifica y finalmente aniquila el mundo natural que es trascendente en la mitología. Las flores, el fuego y el agua son símbolos que yuxtaponen vida y muerte pero de un modo perverso que sugiere un estado de muerte *en* vida. Este estado define la condición existencial de quienes permanecen en la Tierra Baldía, la cual, al ser consecuencia de un contexto histórico específico, se recrea simbólicamente como el resultado del orden social arbitrado por las instituciones que regulan la vida en la ciudad moderna. Así, en *Manhattan Transfer*, la imagen de la ciudad mecanizada, deshumanizada e incluso enferma, es decir, la representación de Manhattan como una Tierra Baldía mítica, simboliza en efecto el colapso filosófico, moral y espiritual que aconteció a la civilización occidental después de la Primera Guerra Mundial, de manera que, de hecho, el texto recrea el mito (originalmente regenerativo) como un mito de Apocalipsis que no ofrece ninguna esperanza de restauración.

The Great Gatsby, de F. Scott Fitzgerald, también identifica simbólicamente la vida en la ciudad de Nueva York en los años veinte con la vida en la Tierra Baldía mítica de los romances artúricos, pero extiende esta analogía para reevaluar los mitos fundacionales de Estados Unidos (y su materialización en el estilo de vida de la alta

sociedad de Nueva York en la década de 1920) a través precisamente del prisma que ofrecen las nuevas formas mito-poéticas de las 'Novelas de la Tierra Baldía'. La noción del 'sueño americano' como un ideal comunitario redentor se socava; una vez más, así, un mito de regeneración comunitaria encaminado a legitimar una forma específica de orden social adquiere una nueva forma para articular un relato sobre la (irreversible) desintegración moral y espiritual de la comunidad. La reinterpretación del mito de la Tierra Baldía es pertinente, entonces, por cuanto la mitología fundacional de los Estados Unidos, tal y como se detalla en el capítulo noveno de este trabajo, parte de una concepción del país en sus orígenes como una tierra de abundancia, un Edén recuperado donde la prosperidad social y la igualdad de oportunidades están inextricablemente conectados a la exorbitante fertilidad de la tierra. La representación de América a comienzos del siglo XX como una Tierra Baldía socava entonces la fuerza legitimadora de aquella mito-poética, un proceso que se hace explícito en la novela de Fitzgerald en la inversión del viaje pionero histórico hacia el Oeste de los Estados Unidos, esto es, de un viaje que recupera el patrón arquetípico de la búsqueda del romance a través de la Tierra Baldía hacia el Edén donde los individuos y las comunidades nacientes pueden prosperar.

Los personajes de Fitzgerald viajan sin embargo desde el corrupto Oeste hacia un Este *gastado*, trazando un movimiento que literalmente desplaza hacia el Este el ideal mítico de peregrinación hacia la 'frontera' oeste de los Estados Unidos. Pero el Este es una Tierra Baldía literal, emblematizada en el ideograma del valle de cenizas, el desierto industrial (o más bien, post-industrial) que da cuenta simbólica de la improductividad económica, la degeneración moral y la esterilidad espiritual de la comunidad irresponsable y materialista que protagoniza la novela. Así, *The Great Gatsby* presenta una suerte de Tierra Baldía literal, gobernada por un Rey Tullido, George Wilson, esto es, la encarnación visible de una clase obrera obliterada cuya única contribución al crecimiento económico especulativo de la comunidad es el cultivo de cenizas. La incapacidad sexual de Wilson mitifica entonces una improductividad económica que a la vez opera como significante de un estado colectivo de degradación espiritual —como se ha explicado, el significado que contiene la nueva forma del mito de la Tierra Baldía. Una vez más, el mito *recontado* no ofrece ninguna alternativa a un final degenerativo. La irresponsabilidad de la comunidad, es decir, la 'enfermedad colectiva' que ha desolado el reino, determina que el único personaje que podría escapar de esa aflicción generalizada, Gatsby, sea víctima de un engaño que lo conduce

a matar a Wilson, el personaje que en términos míticos debería haber sido salvado para que la comunidad pudiese ser redimida. Se transforma la resolución esperada del patrón mítico tradicional, y esta transformación da cuenta de la 'irrealidad' del ideal social e individual encarnado por Gatsby: la creencia compartida en el llamado 'sueño americano' que vertebra los mitos fundacionales de América, y que efectivamente se subvierte en la novela.

Porque en *The Great Gatsby*, el mito de la Tierra Baldía reemplaza a la noción mítica de América como tierra edénica, pero también a las narraciones arquetípicas que han articulado tal noción mítica. El viaje heroico del pionero es reemplazado por el fracaso inevitable de un nuevo pionero, Gatsby, que nunca hubiese podido restaurar la Tierra Baldía, porque él mismo es un producto de ella. Gatsby como *Gatsby* sólo puede existir en un mundo de riqueza irreal y apariencias de esplendor sin fundamento. Él mismo está hecho de cenizas. Los fundamentos ideológicos del mito se revierten, y, en consecuencia, también lo hace el credo articulado por el mito. Nick Carraway superpone el patrón de un romance ordenado moralmente sobre su narración de la Tierra Baldía y, al hacerlo, la novela expone cómo los esfuerzos de mitificación de Nick se anclan en una mitología inalcanzable, desaparecida hace mucho tiempo, que una vez actualizada para dar cuenta de la corrupción material y espiritual del *zeitgeist* de posguerra no puede sino adoptar formas perversas. El movimiento del romance, de la Tierra Baldía hacía un Edén recuperado, sólo puede concebirse desde la imaginación romántica de Nick. Fuera de esta percepción romántica individual, el héroe de un pasado mítico, el último hombre "sano", no puede de hecho distinguirse del resto de la comunidad de "enfermos" donde se ha formado como individuo y donde debe perecer.

Inevitablemente, entonces, en la reinterpretación modernista del mito de la Tierra Baldía no hay esperanza de regeneración, es decir, no hay posibilidad de recuperar las fuerzas místicas que garanticen la redención de un pasado mítico perdido. Así ocurre también en *The Sun Also Rises*, de Ernest Hemingway, el último de los textos modernistas estadounidense explorado en la tercera parte de este estudio. En la novela de Hemingway, como se explica, la incapacidad sexual del personaje principal funcional como una piedra angular simbólica que sostiene una red de significados míticos, los cuales presentan el mundo de la novela como una Tierra Baldía mítica en la que, una vez más, no hay esperanza de regeneración. Simbólicamente, la herida que Jake recibe en el frente, funciona emblemáticamente como síntoma observable de una

enfermedad generalizada, la cual expone los principios relacionados con el género—*genderizados*, suele decirse—que fundamentan la mito-poética tradicional.

Como se argumenta, la novela reinterpreta el mito de la Tierra Baldía mediante la representación de su supuesta teleología mística (o ritual), la cual se presenta en estado de decadencia en el mundo contemporáneo. Esta representación revela además cómo el final regenerativo del mito tradicional de la Tierra Baldía depende en última instancia de la restauración de un 'orden sexual' misógino que ha sido perturbado en el mundo moderno. La restauración de este orden sexual, representado emblemáticamente a través de las corridas de toros en la novela, debería garantizar la restauración de la fecundidad y de la fertilidad en la Tierra Baldía, sin embargo, esta mito-poética sexual que naturaliza los roles de género se representa en la novela de Hemingway como un ejercicio de futilidad. La voluntad individual de Brett frustra el rito, y quienes están destinados a restaurar la tierra, esto es, los toreros que emblematizan la potencia viril de los hombres no-castrados, fracasan en sus intentos de reestablecer el orden sexual (naturalizado) de la mitología tradicional.

The Sun Also Rises se estructura así en base al patrón de un rito fallido que da cuenta de la historia de una Tierra Baldía que no puede ser restaurada, y de una generación de hombres física, espiritual e irredimiblemente enfermos. Una lectura mito-crítica del texto, tal y como se lleva a cabo en el capítulo diez de esta tesis, revela que la novela está lejos de ser simplemente un retrato realista del estilo de vida hedonista y autodestructivo de la generación bohemia y desencantada de la posguerra. De hecho, la novela es una narración profundamente simbólica y mítica que cuenta la historia de un grupo de personajes sin esperanza alguna de ser sanados, que viven resignados a *soportar* su enfermedad en la Tierra Baldía. El patrón narrativo de la novela, el de un rito frustrado, coincide con el de otras obras analizadas en este estudio, como *Heart of Darkness* o *The Waste Land,* textos en los que el patrón arquetípico de la búsqueda en la mitología el romance parece adoptar un movimiento circular que es paralelo al ciclo eternamente recurrente de la vida natural. Al igual que en estos textos, en la novela de Hemingway el movimiento circular de los personajes se configura como cíclico y destructivo a un tiempo, dando así cuenta de un cisma insalvable entre la vida eterna pero degenerativa en la Tierra Baldía y el ciclo eterno pero regenerativo del cosmos. Porque como es característico de todas las Tierras Baldías míticas representados en el modernismo estadounidense que se han explorado críticamente en la tercera parte de este estudio, éstas siempre se presentan como correlatos de un estado colectivo de

degeneración irreparable. En su nueva forma, la Tierra Baldía mítica es eterna e irredimible. No importa cómo de directa o aparentemente simple sea la representación literaria del mito y de sus mitemas a la hora de articular una reflexión sobre los efectos desastrosos que la Primera Guerra Mundial tuvo para la civilización occidental. El mito reinterpretado en la literatura modernista de los Estados Unidos siempre trae a colación la posibilidad de regeneración (es decir, el fin último del mito premoderno) solo para constatar que la restauración social, moral y espiritual es inalcanzable una vez que el mito ha sido reorganizado (y ha adquirido una nueva forma) para dar cuenta del (des)orden social contemporáneo.

LA DECONSTRUCCIÓN DEL MITO

La cuarta parte de este estudio analiza los textos que heredaron la tradición de la representación y reinterpretación mítica de las 'Novelas de la Tierra Baldía' del modernismo estadounidense, y explora cómo esa mito-poética interpretativa se vuelve más y más subversiva en el camino hacia el postmodernismo literario en los Estados Unidos, llevando a cabo una 'deconstrucción de la representación mítica' que alcanza su paroxismo en la década de los sesenta. El primer texto examinado en esta cuarta parte es *To a God Unknown*, de John Steinbeck, una novela de clara influencia mito-ritualista. Esta novela adopta el pesimismo de los 'escritores de la Tierra Baldía' de los años veinte pero, según se explica, introduce elementos de ambivalencia mítica, esto es, la característica más importante del proceso deconstructivo de la representación mítica que se explora en la cuarta parte de este trabajo. En el texto de Steinbeck, por primera vez, las figuras míticas del Caballero del Grial y del Rey Pescador parecen fundirse en un único significante, lo cual impide una representación exitosa del arquetipo del héroe como redentor en una narrativa que, además, describe explícitamente el Grial como un talismán de la muerte. El paisaje mimético del Valle de California, donde se ubica la historia, se superpone en la obra con la imaginería mítica de la Tierra Baldía tal y como ésta se reinterpreta en el modernismo; imágenes de aparente fecundidad y fertilidad se yuxtaponen a la abrumadora presencia de la muerte que sigue a cada giro de los acontecimientos e impregna cada espacio en la novela. El Grial, el origen mítico de la

redención y la regeneración míticas, se reinterpreta como una fuente de muerte y desolación.

La influencia de la mito-poética modernista hace irrevocable la transformación del mito de la Tierra Baldía en un relato de degeneración, claro, pero la novela de Steinbeck profundiza en esta transformación. La desolación del 'viejo Este' se ha extendido para 'contagiar' las tierras fértiles de California, y ahora el conjunto de América se representa de manera explícita como una tierra moribunda. El patrón mítico de la novela fusiona los significados míticos del Rey Tullido y del Caballero del Grial, y al hacerlo se borra expresamente la barrera mítica que solía separar a los hombres sanos de los hombres enfermos. El mito se presenta una vez más como una alternativa para apaciguar un clima social convulso, pero tras la prominente reinterpretación del mito premoderno en la literatura del modernismo de posguerra, se hace evidente en la tradición posterior al modernismo que el mito es una narración adaptable cuyo significado puede alterarse en el proceso de la representación literaria. Éste es sin duda el primer paso en la concepción del mito que permite su deconstrucción como 'gran narrativa' y su utilización explícita como narrativa maleable, ya que, como se sostiene a lo largo de este estudio, los usos literarios de la mitología exponen que los mitos son necesariamente adaptables y están en constante cambio para así naturalizar, explicar, u ordenar una realidad diversa, compleja, y en constante evolución.

La novela de Steinbeck recrea entonces el mito de la Tierra Baldía a lo largo de una narración con ecos mito-ritualistas, en la que las figuras del Rey Pescador y del Caballero del Grial no se diferencian con facilidad, y que, como se ha mencionado, representa el Grial como un talismán de muerte. *Nightwood*, de Djuna Barnes, la novela modernista tardía analizada en el capítulo doce, presenta un mito 'rehecho' en el que el Rey Pescador y el Caballero del Grial son sencillamente indistinguibles, ya que se han fusionado completamente en un mundo en el que la redención sólo puede encontrarse en la renuncia voluntaria a encontrar y conocer el Grial y su significado, un deseo que sin embargo los personajes de la novela no pueden reprimir. Como heredera evidente de las 'Novelas de la Tierra Baldía' de la década de los años veinte, *Nightwood* reinterpreta el mito en cuestión como un relato de degeneración que, de hecho, subvierte la morbosidad de la vida contemporánea (formulada por la teoría de la degeneración). Pero en la novela de Barnes, la ambivalencia simbólica que hacía de toda nueva forma de vida en la Tierra Baldía una manifestación de enfermedad y corrupción, se ha transformado en ambivalencia mítica, de manera que el Doctor protagonista es a la vez

el sanador y el Rey Pescador que necesita ser sanado por cuanto padece una 'enfermedad universal' que aflige a todos los personajes de la novela, incluyendo a Nora, el Caballero del Grial que formula la pregunta trascendental al Rey Pescador no para sanar a éste, sino buscando alivio espiritual y psicológico para sí misma. Así, uno por uno, los diferentes mitemas que conforman el mito recreado de la Tierra Baldía se confunden, su significado resulta cada vez más ambiguo. El resultado es la deconstrucción, la invalidación de las dicotomías hasta entonces aparentemente irrompibles que articulan el pensamiento mito-poético.

Como se ha argumentado una y otra vez a lo largo de este estudio, el mito funcional principalmente como dispositivo retórico que tiene como objetivo contener, simplificar y explicar las complejidades del mundo, lo que lo constituye como una representación discursiva de la cual la comunidad puede obtener certezas sociales, morales y, a menudo, espirituales que permitan aprehender el caos inherente a la vida de una manera no destructiva. La mito-poética es entonces un esfuerzo simbólico, y como tal, se construye sobre un conjunto de oposiciones conceptuales jerárquicas, como se demuestra a través del estudio de la evolución del género del romance a lo largo de esta tesis. Por consiguiente, el mito es estructura a partir de las oposiciones semánticas que clasifican el mundo y la existencia humana dentro del orden simbólico. En todos los casos analizados en este estudio, la interpretación mito-crítica de los textos revela de forma consistente que el mito es una construcción discursiva que opera como un arma ideológica, por cuanto trata de legitimar un sistema social y político específico, así como la distribución de poder en dicho sistema. En una novela como *Nightwood*, sin embargo, el mito no sólo se revela como la articulación en forma de narración de una ideología de poder que ha sido construida socialmente y es por lo tanto inmanente; además, el mito es *desmantela* sin intención de que pueda (o deba) ser reconstruido, con el objetivo de representar así una realidad presimbólica, es decir, *premítica* y libre de dicotomías de género, no importa cuán caótica resulte.

En la tradición angloamericana explorada a lo largo de este estudio, el significado mítico siempre ha existido *antes* que el significante simbólico. Por ejemplo, en *The Waste Land*, un número considerable de personajes funcionan como referentes de un único significante mítico inmutable como es el Rey Pescador. El significado precede al texto, por tanto el proceso de reinterpretación mítica explorado conserva la dicotomía jerárquica básica de toda representación. En *Nightwood*, como ocurrirá en otros textos posteriores al modernismo y en textos *posmodernistas*, aquella dicotomía

jerárquica se subvierte. El significante se revela como preexistente al (y por tanto creador del) significado. Nora y el Doctor pueden identificarse como figuras del Rey Pescador y del Caballero del Grial de manera casi simultánea. El significado mítico en consecuencia se expone como el resultado del acto de representación, y por tanto su significado pierde toda consideración de absoluto, universal y verdadero. El significado mítico se considera entonces contingente y carente de certezas trascendentales. Como este estudio argumenta, en última instancia, el significado mítico en la literatura se construye a través de la intersección de un relato premoderno arquetípico y de sus representaciones literarias, potencialmente infinitas. En los textos posteriores al modernismo y en los textos posmodernistas explorados en esta tesis, tal noción se revela según el discurso mítico se deconstruye progresivamente a través de los nuevos procesos de reinterpretación mítica.

En *Nightwood* no hay deseo o nostalgia por la recuperación del orden social representado en la mito-poética tradicional. La degeneración, que es en verdad la 'enfermedad universal' que asola la Tierra Baldía de entreguerras, ya no se entiende como una desviación del un género biológico sano que tiene que (o debería) reestablecerse, porque si el mito tradicional de la Tierra Baldía articula un deseo común de renovación eterna de la vida y de restauración del orden social, la novela de Barnes incorpora ese discurso para *deshacerlo.* El deseo de rehabilitación de la potencia sexual reproductiva de los hombres que el mito establece como fuente de toda vida se deja atrás y se reemplaza por la negación del principio mítico según el cual el vigor sexual masculino se concibe como fuente de regeneración. Los fundamentos originales del mito se desestabilizan y, en consecuencia, el texto desafía la creencia de que tales fundamentos son de hecho reflejos de leyes naturales/universales. En efecto, el orden social naturalizado en el mito premoderno se torna *baldío* en el mundo moderno. Y ésa es precisamente la nueva Tierra Baldía, representada en la literatura después del modernismo: una tierra sin mitología o, mejor, una tierra sin fe en la mitología.

En los demás textos explorados en la cuarta parte de este estudio, este nuevo tipo de Tierra Baldía mítica se representa a menudo a través de procesos muy complejos de representación mítica que combinan diversos conjuntos de referencias para desafíar la noción de que es posible representar de forma directa un significado único y cohesionado. A la vez, sin embargo, esta complejidad referencial se sitúa en paralelo con representaciones del mito premoderno cada más directas y literales (las cuales, sin embargo, modifican drásticamente el significado mítico). En los textos posteriores al

modernismo, el Caballero del Grial es recibido en el castillo del Rey Pescador donde encuentra el Grial y formula la pregunta que le permite acceder a un conocimiento esotérico de la vida y, por fin, suceder al rey enfermo. La búsqueda se completa y por tanto también lo hace el rito que da forma (y significado) al mito, pero la resolución feliz del relato es completamente inútil; nada puede hacer para regenerar la Tierra Baldía posmoderna porque, en base a la representación mítica 'multivalente', mitemas y significados míticos son ahora indistinguibles, y las acciones heroicas encaminadas a propiciar la regeneración se reconfiguran en acciones inevitablemente destructivas.

En el caso de *The Natural*, de Bernard Malamud, el patrón del mito de la Tierra Baldía resulta evidente en la novela pero, sin embargo, éste se superpone a un tipo diferente de narración mítica: una historia del folklore del béisbol que multiplica las referencias míticas y sirve para esbozar una perspectiva histórica global y muy pesimista de Estados Unidos en la década 1950. La noción de una identidad nacional unificada, configurada a través del folklore del béisbol, en parte, e identificada retrospectivamente con la visión idealizada de los años cincuenta que se generó durante los años ochenta en Estados Unidos, se subvierte por tanto en la novela de Malamud a través de un proceso de ambigüedad mítica en función del cuál los héroes y villanos de la mitología del béisbol se identifican con mitemas artúricos opuestos, dando lugar a un sistema complejo de representación mítica que, de hecho, da cuenta eficaz de las incertidumbres que marcaron el contexto social y político de la novela y que, en consecuencia, determinan el proceso de representación mítica en el texto.

Estableciendo una continuidad de significado con *The Great Gatsby*, *The Natural* representa el materialismo de los prósperos años cincuenta como encarnación paradójica de la Tierra Baldía moral y espiritual que resulta del horror de la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Por supuesto, esta reinterpretación mítica continúa y exacerba la imaginería y la ideología central de la mito-poética modernista, y por ello presenta una caracterización de la sociedad estadounidense en la década de 1950 como afligida por una desolación irreparable, a pesar de la prosperidad económica del capitalismo de consumo que enmascaraba el horror en el que tal riqueza hundía sus raíces, esto es, la violencia, la destrucción y la deshumanización de la guerra; la represión política de la época, y las desigualdades sociales de la 'era consumista', que distaba mucho de ser idílica. Elocuentemente, *The Natural* retrata esta sociedad aparentemente próspera pero verdaderamente degenerativa mediante la presentación de una narrativa del Grial que multiplica las referencias míticas contradictorias hasta fusionar en un único significante

(que también funciona como referente del Grial) el Edén y la Tierra Baldía, de manera que ambos extremos de la mitología del romance se convierten en un único espacio ambivalente del cual el individuo no puede escapar—no sólo en el nivel de la representación, sino también en el nivel del significado mítico. La Tierra Baldía y la 'Tierra de Abundancia' se transformar en lugares míticos indistinguibles; en efecto, se ha reconstruido la oposición binaria jerárquica que solía vertebrar el mito en el romance tradicional.

El resultado de tal deconstrucción mítica es la refutación completa de la ideología que subyace a la versión premoderna del mito, una circunstancia que se hace evidente en los textos posmodernistas analizados en los dos últimos capítulos de este estudio. Como se detalla en el capítulo catorce, la transformación degenerativa irreversible de la tierra prometida estadounidense (y de la mitología en términos generales) en una Tierra Baldía que define en términos míticos la existencia contemporánea se había convertido desde los años veinte en tema y metáfora recurrente en la literatura de los Estados Unidos. En los años sesenta, esta tendencia está ampliamente consolidada, como lo demuestra, por ejemplo, la denuncia de Saul Bellow en su novela *Herzog* (1964) de lo que él define como "los lugares comunes del paradigma de la Tierra Baldía" (81). Esta "crisis de disolución completa" (Bellow 80) que Kermode designó con el término "wastelandism" (Ending 113) da forma a una tradición que retoma Ken Kesey en *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, una novela que tradicionalmente se ha interpretado como un romance arquetípico elaborado a la manera del western. Esta interpretación crítica se reevalúa no obstante en este estudio, teniendo en consideración el hecho de que las reinterpretaciones posteriores al modernismo y posmodernistas del mito de la Tierra Baldía (esto es, el sustrato mítico de la novela de Kesey) posibilitan la impugnación del valor de verdad del mito original. Pues en efecto, la novela posmodernista de Kesey socava la Gran Narrativa del modernismo según la cuál la mitología premoderna puede funcionar como fuente de orden y de significado verdadero para organizar y dar sentido al caos y la anarquía de la existencia humana. Al igual que en otros textos analizados en la cuarta parte de este estudio, en *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest,* el presunto héroe del romance encarna múltiples referencias míticas cambiantes, lo cual da como resultado una reconfiguración del ideal mítico que supuestamente representaría este personaje y, por tanto, demuestra que la afirmación de que el mito premoderno transmite un significado universal y absolutamente cierto —el cual puede transferirse al mundo moderno con el fin de darle sentido— es de hecho

falsa. El significado del mito (tal y como se representa en la novela de Kesey) puede entenderse claramente como el significado que resulta de la *reorganización* de los significantes textuales. La historia de los personajes construye el significado; el significado no preexiste a la narración, y por ello es razonable cuestionar el argumento tradicional que afirma que el texto de Kesey extrae su significado de la mito-poética masculinista desde la que se construye.

De hecho, según se argumenta, la novela relata una vuelta a la naturaleza por parte de los personajes, así como un conjunto de acciones violentas; no obstante, en lugar de legitimar esa violencia narrando una historia de regeneración a través de la violencia (como ocurre, no por casualidad, en el primer texto analizado en este estudio, *Edward II*) *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* expone la trampa retórica de una mito-poética que naturaliza la violencia sexual a través de una historia de supremacía machista. Porque en el texto de Kesey, la mística del vigor sexual masculino entendido como fuerza vital sólo da lugar a la perpetuación eterna de una agresividad fútil y de una violencia cíclica inacabable. La liberación de la sexualidad reprimida de los hombres sólo agrava su enfermedad. El mito es funcional en la novela; se representa de una manera (aparentemente) bastante sencilla: la figura del Caballero del Grial parece completar su viaje heroico y restaurar la salud del Rey Pescador. Pero la reordenación de los significantes deconstruye la ideología que subyace a este relato. La curación del Rey Pescador ya no provoca el restablecimiento de un clima social marcado por la deshumanización y la estandarización cultural donde las formas de control social aniquilan la voluntad del individuo para vivir. La conexión mística entre el Rey Pescador y la Tierra Baldía ya no tiene el significado trascendente que cohesionaba el mito premoderno, y el Grial no tiene cabida en el relato. El mito está representado de manera literal y explícita, pero la regeneración —la justificación ideológica y mística de la narración medieval— ya es no parte de la historia.

Como demuestra la lectura mito-crítica de *V.* y *The Crying of Lot 49*, de Thomas Pynchon, llevada a cabo en el último capítulo de la tesis, el horror y la anarquía del mundo crean nuevas versiones del mito premoderno en la nueva Tierra Baldía, entendida ésta como la existencia posmoderna en la que no existe ya una mitología verdadera. Estas nuevas versiones narran, en este caso, un viaje de búsqueda hacia la aniquilación. En *V.*, el patrón lineal de la búsqueda mítica se transforma en un *hundimiento*, un viaje en forma de V que conduce a la desaparición completa. Stencil persigue su sueño de aniquilación (es decir, un conocimiento extra-consciente y

autodestructivo del significado de V.) sólo para descubrir que no puede haber redención alguna en un mundo donde toda la vida, literalmente, se ha vuelto inerte. La Tierra Baldía es ahora una Tierra Inanimada, donde la vida ya no está limitada por la frustración, la enfermedad o la muerte porque simplemente no queda vida, solo una apariencia robótica de vida. La muerte engendra *inanimación*. La sexualidad no está frustrada, no es estéril, repugnante o violenta. Se ha convertido por el contrario en una forma aniquiladora de procreación que sustituye a los organismos vivos por prótesis. La simbolización literaria del mito artúrico explorado a lo largo de este estudio cierra así el círculo. De rito de sacrificio a representación dramática de tal sacrificio; de dramatización del rito a la composición de un romance; de la recitación de un romance cortesano a la elaboración de una metáfora de la modernidad —tal es, desde una perspectiva mito-ritualista, la evolución del mito de la Tierra Baldía, desde sus orígenes rituales hasta su uso literario a lo largo de la modernidad histórica. En la era de la modernidad cultural, sin embargo, lo que este estudio ha examinado es la desintegración progresiva de tal mito entendido como metáfora del mundo moderno, y la subversión continua del significado mítico supuestamente contenido en esa metáfora.

En el último capítulo de este estudio, se puede observar entonces un retorno a la representación pre-simbólica del mito, la cual explota la literalidad de la estructura ritual y del patrón narrativo del mito, para revertir sin embargo el significado (supuestamente verdadero) de éste. Es evidente cómo la simbolización del mito de la Tierra Baldía toma la forma de un sacrificio literal en la historia de un personaje particular en *V.* Sin embargo, en lugar de presentar el asesinato del rey divino, la novela de Pynchon cuenta la historia de una joven que se sacrifica a sí misma bajo la influencia de V., es decir, del Grial del texto, el cual a su vez se representa como un vehículo para conseguir la mecanización y la aniquilación de la vida. El significado ritual y posiblemente trascendente del mito se expone de manera explícita, pero tal fuerza ritualística ya no busca la restauración de la vida, sino la destrucción final de las formas de vida que aún resisten en la nueva Tierra Baldía de prótesis y robótica. Una situación similar se describe en *The Crying of Lot 49*, como se explica: los huesos humanos de las víctimas de la Segunda Guerra Mundial se *cosechan* y se comercializan como fertilizante. Así, la novela da forma a una narrativa perversa y sin embargo literal de *fertilización*, pero esta es, sin embargo, sólo una manifestación simbólica de entre muchas que configuran o bien una conspiración ancestral, o bien una narración arquetípica eternamente recurrente. No puede distinguirse entre ambas.

Una vez acaecida la modernidad estética, las creencias que subyacen al mito pueden modificarse a voluntad, y por tanto el mito funciona por fin como una mera ficción transitoria en la que los significados míticos que articulan una historia mística de regeneración —en el caso del mito de la Tierra Baldía— se sustituyen por una 'multiplicidad de superficies' que, de hecho, ahora contienen el significado del relato (cambiante y transitorio). Por supuesto, una vez que la comunidad ya no cree en la trascendencia de la mitología, el mito pierde su finalidad como instrumento de cohesión social, y se convierte en una forma de expresión estética que no posee ya un significado absoluto. La antinomia Edén/Tierra Baldía que había articulado tantas representaciones literarias del mito de la Tierra Baldía, como se ha explorado a lo largo de este estudio, se revela entonces como un 'ideologema', es decir, como una construcción ideológica que proyecta un sistema de valores sobre una comunidad, pero que, en realidad, está determinado social e históricamente.

Eso es un mito, según se ha considerado a lo largo de este proyecto de investigación sobre los usos literarios de la mitología premoderna: la función en origen de la mitología es social e ideológica, no necesariamente cosmogónica. Los procesos de representación mítica en la literatura revelan precisamente tal inmanencia del mito. La funcionalidad de la mito-poética como estrategia narrativa que da forma a la trama y construye significados literarios es contingente y está ideológicamente condicionada. Y, a pesar de que tal mito-poética se ha institucionalizado a través de la repetición a lo largo de la tradición, aquélla en realidad se reinterpreta y se subvierte de modo recurrente en los textos literarios que resisten las imposiciones ideológicas de la cultura dominante. Esto es así porque esa mitología reinterpretada y subversiva que puede hallarse en la literatura funciona en realidad como forma de contestación ideológica frente a los discursos de poder dominantes que se articulan simbólicamente en la mitología tradicional.

SUMMARY IN ENGLISH

This doctoral dissertation examines the processes of representation and reinterpretation of the Arthurian myth of the Waste Land throughout the Anglo-American literary tradition. The aim is to explore critically the ideological repercussions of mythical reinterpretation as a literary practice, on the basis that myths, as it is argued throughout the present study, articulate and symbolize dominant power ideologies that are warrantors of social and political order. Yet once reinterpreted in literature, as it is explored through the case study of the Waste Land myth, the foundational ideology of myth is often reinterpreted and even subverted. This results in remade mythical narratives that give account of the ideological counter-discourses that challenge and contest the dominant discourse of social order and political stability legitimized through traditional mythopoeia.

This process of mythical reinterpretation exercised as a form of ideological contestation is analyzed through a trans-historical study of the Waste Land myth along the literary tradition in English. The Arthurian myth of the Waste Land, as explained in detail at the beginning of this study, narrates the story of the Fisher King, the wounded king of the Waste Land, who appears for the first time in Chrétien de Troyes's unfinished courtly romance *Perceval* (ca. 1180). The Fisher King has been wounded between the thighs and rendered sterile, and, as a consequence, his infertility has resulted in the wasting of his kingdom. The tale overtly gives shape to a providential notion of kingship that presupposes a mystical and inextricable relationship that binds the fates of the king and of his kingdom, and thus it establishes that, in order for the land to be restored to its former prosperity, the king's wound must be relieved. Such

task of deliverance falls upon the hands of the Grail Knight, who must find the Grail—or alternatively the meaning behind the Grail—in order to heal the Fisher King and consequently restore the Waste Land.

For the purpose of the myth-critical analysis carried out through this study, the most relevant phenomenon in the process of representation and reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth in pre-modern texts is the pervasiveness of its core mythemes and ideological meaning along the centuries, namely: the Maimed King and his sexual impotence; the mystical connection between the King's emasculation and the blighted land that has either been plagued, cursed, or wrecked by war; the narrative pattern of the quest; the magical, restorative properties of the Grail; and finally the heroic task of a young knight, who takes up as his duty the trial of finding the Grail so as to heal the Maimed King and restore the Waste Land, physically and spiritually. However, from the perspective of this study, it is critical, too, to notice the successive reinterpretations of the myth that take place over the centuries, specifically the process of euhemerism and the subsequent Christianization of the tale throughout the Middle Ages. One can thus begin to realize how over the course of the centuries, the Waste Land myth articulated varied symbolic, historical, social and religious meanings, depending on the communitarian structures and dominant ideologies that shaped the different reinterpretations of the myth. The dialectics that arbitrate the continuous struggle between permanence and reinterpretation in the literary representation of the myth is the key to interpreting the ideological—and often subversive—functionality of pre-modern mythology in the Anglo-American literary tradition, at different stages of what has been distinguished as 'historical modernity' and 'cultural modernity'. Therefore, it must always be taken into consideration that the Waste Land myth has traditionally operated as the symbolic correlative of a specific historical and socio-cultural context which has thus been reflected and symbolically represented in literature by means of the recurrent process of mythical representation and reinterpretation that is examined in detail in the course of this study.

This process of mythical representation and reinterpretation was examined along four separated parts, which correspond to four separated stages of the Anglo-American literary tradition, namely: early-modern political drama; the Romance Revival in British literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; American modernism; and American literature after modernism. The first part, consisting of three chapters, explores how the Waste Land myth, as the myth of medieval romance par excellence,

remains functional in Renaissance drama while being challenged by the political counter-discourses of the time. In a time of political change and philosophical uncertainty, the plays explored—Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II* (ca. 1592), and William Shakespeare's *Richard II* (ca. 1595) and *The Tempest* (ca. 1610)—give account of the 'mythical change' that took place in the Elizabethan modes of representation, which can in fact be probed through the myth-critical examination of the Fisher-King figures and varied Waste Lands to be found in contemporary political drama. As it is argued in this part of the present study, such 'mythical change' entails, symbolically, the banishment from Eden of the emerging British nation, which is articulated in the plays as paralleling the transition from ritual to History as the dominant discourse to comprehend and represent the world in the modern era.

The second part of the present dissertation continues the myth-critical exploration of romance patterns and their intersection with historical discourses by analyzing the British tradition of romance along the nineteenth century, but also taking into account the genealogy of the 'Romance Revival' in the eighteenth century. This part, as explained in the introduction and with more detail throughout the study, examines how the *evolution* of romance within new social, political and ideological contexts brings about a necessary reinterpretation of romance mythology, which of course affects the literary representation of the Waste Land myth. This reinterpretation subverts romance ideology progressively during the nineteenth century—such is the so-called 'progress' of romance, which might in fact be regarded as the evolution by means of which medieval romance is transformed into the legitimizing narrative *of progress*. The phenomenon is relatively short-lived; towards the end of the century, romance has overtly become a literary mode that articulates a tale of collective (irreparable) degeneration. As such it is examined along three chapters. The first explores Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814), after a brief revision of the origins of the Romance Revival through a commentary on Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). The second analyzes Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (1856-9 and 1868-74), as an illustration of the presence of medievalist romance in Victorian poetry. The third examines the most paradigmatic instance of an imperial 'romance of degeneration': Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1898). Throughout the study of these texts, the subversive representation of the Waste Land myth becomes the focus of analysis, as it reveals the emerging ideological crisis that will erupt in the symbolically prophetic

announcement of the horror looming over the fin-de-siècle and leading unstoppably towards the moral, philosophical and historical collapse of the Great War.

The third part of this study analyzes precisely that: post-war mythopoeia in American modernism. The aim of the four chapters that make up this third part is to explore how the reshaped myth of the Waste Land gives account of the chaos, fragmentation and hopelessness of the modernist *zeitgeist*, eloquently represented in literature by means of a myth construed on the themes of sickness, impotence, sterility and, above all, the hope for an eventual regeneration. The Waste Land myth thus becomes the governing metaphor and main structuring device of a series of texts—as explored in the present study: T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), and Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926)—and, as a consequence, it is reshaped, put out of order so that it can give account of the chaos and anarchy of the contemporary world. The result is an inevitable re-signification of the myth. As represented in the aforementioned texts of American modernism, the Waste Land myth no longer unifies the community and integrates the individual within its institutions; on the contrary, the myth functions as a means for the individual to represent and apprehend the degeneration of a community from which they have become alienated.

The trend is continued and exacerbated in American literature after modernism, which is studied in the fourth and last part of this dissertation. The first chapter of this part explored John Steinbeck's *To a God Unknown* (1933) as a novel that inherits the pessimistic mythopoeia of the 1920s but that also prefigures the new modes of mythical representation that will become prominent in subsequent decades, as it pertains specifically to the phenomenon of mythical 'multivalence' through which mythical meanings first converge and lastly dissolve. This 'multivalence' of mythical meaning is very prominent in the texts that are subsequently examined, namely: Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* (1937), Bernard Malamud's *The Natural* (1952), Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962) and Thomas Pynchon's *V.* (1963) and *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966). Through mythical ambivalence, mythical signifieds coalesce in one single signifier and thus become changeable and undistinguishable. Mythical meaning dissolves and, at last, the transcendence of mythology is refuted through the immanent and contingent textual meaning of mythology.

As mentioned, these four parts explore four (more or less) separated stages of the Anglo-American literary tradition. These stages have been chosen due the relevance

and functionality of the 'mode' of romance in the texts selected, but also due to subversive force of the reinterpreted Waste Land myth in the time periods and literary aesthetics explored. Reasons of ideological coherence in terms of the specific and meaningful reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth as a myth of political domination and social degeneration were the key to the selection of the corpus of literary texts. Texts and authors were chosen in the basis of the objective intended: to explore the immanence of mythical meaning in literature and to disclose the political and ideological foundation of mythology as a legitimizing master narrative enforced by the ruling and dominant classes, insofar as mythopoeia naturalizes (and thus perpetuates) the social and political status quo.

CONCLUSIONS

The first part of this study explored how the political and social anxieties of early-modern England, concentrated on the themes of legitimacy, authority and violence, were articulated dramatically through a process of mythical representation that functioned dialectically. On the one hand, myth structured plot and gave form (and alleged meaning) to History through a process of 'emplotment'; on the other hand, those structures and dominant meanings were subverted to bring along a 'deconsecration' of kingship. History and politics were represented in Renaissance drama as partaking in the cyclical, ritual and ever-regenerative nature of mythopoeia, but in the cases explored, the dramatization of History and politics presented mythical recurrence as articulating a state of moral, political and historical degeneration. This began to form the main thesis of this study: the ideologically-subversive immanence of mythology as represented in literature, explored through the case study of the Waste Land myth, a pre-modern myth of social and spiritual regeneration that is however reinterpreted in the post-medieval texts explored as a myth of degeneration.

The mythical substratum of the plays explored in the first part of this study is interpreted as the consequence of historical events needing to be transformed into *stories* so that History can be comprehended and exploited ideologically. This notion is in fact a constant throughout the present study, as the function of mythology cannot be extricated from the necessity to make the chaos of reality apprehensible within the

limits of human consciousness. In the case of early-modern historiography, this determines that medieval history is retold in a way that accommodates the culturally-provided category of romance, which thus comes to structure historiographical narratives and, by extension, the history plays that are based on them. Yet as mentioned, the regenerative meaning of the *mythos* of romance is debunked in the plays explored, in which the ever-recurrent structure of mythopoeia cannot disguise the violence that is inherent to the domination and perpetuation of a particular set of power structures, which mythology attempts to naturalize but literary representation exposes and contests.

This sort of dialectical struggle between the status quo of mythology and the undermining forces of literary representation continued throughout the 'Romance Revival' of the eighteenth century in British literature, and of course along the tradition of a recovered romance in the nineteenth century. Romance had been emptied out of its original meaning in the modern era, and thus the British enlightened tradition had to provide a new meaning to old structures. Romances were thus rewritten to give account of the specific social and ideological concerns of the ruling classes in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Britain, but the new romance actually re-fakes what had been revealed to be counterfeit already in early modern England. The enlightened re-appropriation of the regenerative meaning of romance is thus in vain. The new, enlightened romance simply articulates the social and political tensions of a time when bourgeois capitalism has become the dominant social force, for in the new world order, romance mythology attempts to naturalize the social structures not of a feudalism evolving towards an absolutist monarchy, but of a new social order dominated by mercantilism and the pursuit of wealth. Myth is coated with a halo of upper-middle class sentiment, but once again the subversive literary representation of mythology undercuts its dominant meaning by exposing its ideological agenda.

In Scott's *Waverley*, for instance, romance articulates a story of irreparable cultural and historical loss, which functions as counterpoint to the new romance of domestic triumph. This new romance is devoid of magic and transcendence, and legitimized solely through the rhetoric of progress: regeneration is not a mystical endgame, but the achievement of financial prosperity and mercantilist growth, which is itself inextricable from a stage of moral and cultural degeneration that in consequence cannot ever be restored. Hence the reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth in the texts explored in the second part of this study gives account of the desolate condition of the society of Enlightenment, which was in fact plunging towards the unprecedented horror

that would come with the new century. Indeed, from Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* onwards, the representation of the Waste Land myth as a myth of degeneration no longer signifies the collapse of the old world depicted in pre-modern mythopoeia, which could not be reconciled with historical modernity; it signifies the collapse of historical modernity itself.

In most texts analyzed along this study—arguably in *all* texts analyzed along this study, except the explicitly postmodernist ones—myths are represented as the socially-accepted fictions that sustain the illusion of civilization only for brief time, simultaneously necessary and futile for warranting social order when the political structures that sustain the social equilibrium are nothing but a *representation* of power. As represented in British literature towards the fin-de-siècle, myth is not simply immanent and devoid of mysticism. It is losing its most pragmatic function as an ordering device that makes it possible to at least *explain* reality. In subsequent decades, American modernism attempts to order reality by making it conform to the pattern of a pre-modern myth of regeneration, but the result is hardly satisfactory, as reality not only remains chaotic, but its inherent chaos is transferred to mythology.

As explored throughout this study and detailed in its conclusions, it is undeniable that the mythical emblem of the Waste Land is a very eloquent symbol to articulate the post-traumatic effects of two world wars along the twentieth century, especially in the American context, where the notion of a mythical irreparable Waste Land stands in direct opposition to the foundational conception and representation of the United States as restored Eden or land of plenty. Certainly in the literature of American modernism the mythical Waste Land becomes the most expressive metaphor to characterize the horror-struck, death-ridden post-war world, and through this symbolization the myth loses its ritualistic force, because the myth is progressively dismantled and set out of order. This loss comes to signify the impossibility of communitarian survival and progressively gives shape to a truly apocalyptic reinterpretation of the myth. The modern city, for instance, becomes the symbol of contemporary existence, a place where not even death can bring along new life, because there is only an imitation of life that fails to conceal the physical and spiritual sterility that plights the contemporary world.

The new reinterpretation of the Waste Land myth, as mentioned, sets its mythemes out of order and is based on the perverse re-signification of conventional symbols of regeneration (flowers, fire, water), which are presented as signifying an all-

encompassing, life-denying, non-redemptive death. In the context of American literature, the mythical Waste Land where the restoration of life is impossible is dialectically opposed to the foundational mythology of America, which construed the new country as a land of plenty, a newly recovered Eden where social prosperity and equality of opportunity were inextricably bound to the overabundant earth fertility. Successful pioneering quests are thus replaced with the inevitable failure of pioneer-like characters that can never restore the Waste Land because they have been bred out of the Waste Land themselves, and thus find no alternative other than endurance and exile from a blighted kingdom that cannot ever be restored. The Waste Land represented in modernist literature is eternal and unredeemable. No matter how straightforwardly the representation of the myth and of its mythemes articulates a reflection on the catastrophic effects of First World War had upon western civilization, the myth reinterpreted in modernism always brings about the possibility of communal regeneration only to state that social, moral and spiritual restoration is unattainable once the myth has been rearranged to give account of the new, contemporary social (dis)order.

The interpretative mythopoeia of American literature after modernism continues this trend, but it becomes more and more subversive in the path towards literary postmodernism, carrying out a deconstruction of mythical representation in the broadest sense of the term that reaches its paroxysm in the 1960s. Mythical 'multivalence' is the most crucial aspect of this deconstructive mythical representation, and it begins when in Steinbeck's *To a God Unknown* the mythical figures of Grail Knight and Fisher King coalesce in one single signifier, which prevents the successful representation of the hero-as-redeemer archetype in a narrative that explicitly depicts the Grail as a talisman of death. Myth is presented as an alternative of order for a convulsive social climate, but it has become an overtly adaptable narrative the meaning of which can be changed at whim in the process of literary representation. This is the first step in an understanding of myth that deconstructs it as a master narrative so as to explicitly employ it as an adaptive narrative, after the literary tradition explored along the present study has demonstrated that literary representation discloses myth as necessarily malleable and constantly evolving in its attempt to naturalize, explain, or organize diverse social realities that are in constant evolution.

As argued throughout this dissertation, myth functions primarily as a rhetoric device that aims to capture, simplify and explain the complexities of the world. It is a

discursive representation of reality from which to obtain social, moral and often transcendental certainties that make it possible to apprehend the chaos of reality in a non-destructive way. Mythopoeia is a symbolic endeavour, built upon a set of hierarchical conceptual oppositions that classify the world and functioning as an ideological weapon, attempting to legitimize a specific social and political system and the ways in which that system distributes power. In the texts of 'after-modernism' and postmodernism, however, myth is not only revealed as a socially-constructed and thus immanent power ideology; it is actually dismantled with no intentions of ever being reconstructed again, aiming to instead represent a pre-symbolic (or non-symbolic) reality, no matter how chaotic. The principles of the myth are destabilized and in consequence the texts challenge the belief that such principles could actually recreate a true natural cosmos. In effect, the naturalized social order construed symbolically in pre-modern myth is thus laid waste in the modern world. Such is the new Waste Land, as represented in literature after modernism: a land without mythology, or rather, a land with no faith in mythology.

The irreversible degeneration of the Promised Land of America (and of mythology) into the Waste Land of contemporary existence replaced the foundational ideal of the United States as a land of plenty in the American literary canon as a recurrent theme and a governing metaphor. And yet, in the literature of the 1960s, the literary symbolization of the Arthurian myth explored throughout this study comes full circle. From literally killing the king in a ritual of sacrifice, to dramatically representing that ritual; from staging the primitive ritual to composing a romance; from reciting the courtly romance to fabricating a metaphor for modernity—such is, on the basis of myth-ritualism, the evolution of the Waste Land myth, from its ritualistic origins to its literary use in historical modernity. In the age of cultural modernity, however, what this study has examined from Tennyson onwards is the progressive disintegration of such metaphor for the modern world and the continued subversion of the mythical meaning supposedly contained in it.

After aesthetic modernity, the deconstruction of myth as a socially-constructed ideologeme results in the refutations of its alleged transcendence, which in effect transforms myth into a transitory fiction containing a transient and ever-changing meaning. The loss of mythical transcendence brings about the loss of myth's functionality as a socially-integrating discourse and thus myth can project no longer the system of values that structures and regulates a specific community. This argument

concludes the examination of myth carried out in the present study, which as explained analyzes the post-medieval literary uses of pre-modern mythology to conclude that the function of myth is social and ideological rather than cosmogonist. The processes of mythical representation in literature reveal such immanence, for the functionality of mythopoeia as a form of narrative that structures plot and constructs literary meanings is contingent and thus ideologically conditioned. And, even though such mythopoeia has been institutionalized through repetition along tradition, it is in fact recurrently reinterpreted and subverted in the literature that resists the dominant cultural discourses. For such reinterpreted, subversive 'mythology of literature' in fact operates as a form of ideological contestation against the dominant power discourses that are symbolically articulated in traditional mythology.

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